

**EXILES IN BABYLON**  
**Or Children of Light**  
**Written in 1870**  
**{Book Number Two in Eardley Series}**

**By Charlotte Maria Tucker (A.L.O.E.)**

Chapter 1

First Impressions

“Oh, mother, you’ve not a notion what a splendid place this is!” exclaimed Ned Holdich, the steward’s son, as, with his bright young face glowing with pleasure, he burst into the little parlor in which his parent was engaged on her knees in unpacking a box.

“I could see as we came along the drive last evening that the park is large and well wooded, but it was growing late, and—”

“Oh, we just saw nothing in the dark,” cried Ned, “why, we scarcely caught a glimpse of the deer behind the trees and there are hundreds of them, bounding so lightly that they scarce seem to touch the ground. There is one with such grand branching antlers! I’ve been exploring ever since breakfast, for one could not set to work the first day.”

“I’m afraid that ‘play first and work afterwards’ is your motto, Ned,” said Mrs. Holdich, glancing up from her employment.

“That’s to remind me that I ought to help you, mother,” cried the boy, making a sudden dive at the box and scattering half of its contents over the floor, heaping books upon linens and medicine bottles on books, with most alarming energy.

“Nay, nay, my dear boy, you had better leave things alone,” expostulated the mother, “let me go on quietly with my unpacking, while you tell me of all that you have discovered.”

“I see that you won’t let me practise digging here, for fear of what I should turn up,” laughed Ned, as he threw himself on a chair, glad enough of the permission to be idle. “You shall do the working while I do the talking. That’s what uncle would call a fair division of labor. Well, where shall I begin my description? Just between this cottage and the Castle, there’s a place—such a place, I don’t believe that there’s anything like it in London. Fancy a broad gravel walk, with a row of statues on each side, each upon a high stand—”

“Pedestal,” suggested Mrs. Holdich.

“I never remember the grand names! And then at the end of the row, fancy a high green hillock, with grass as smooth as velvet and a set of marble steps right up it. And at the top of it a building half finished, one of the finest, I do believe, that ever was seen. Of course it will look fifty times as well when they take away all the scaffolding about it. There are men at work still on the outside, but the inside looks quite complete. I could not resist going in and oh, such painting and carving and gilding! I never saw anything like it in my life.”

“Is it for a chapel?” inquired Mrs. Holdich.

“A chapel! Oh, dear no!” exclaimed Ned. “It’s a kind of monument, Parker told me, of all the grand deeds of all the Lestrangle family since the old Conqueror came. On the tip top, there’s to be a huge group in bronze of a Sir Digby Lestrangle, who lived hundreds and

hundreds of years ago, riding over a luckless Saracen, whom he has cut down with his sword. Parker says that from such a height it will be seen for twenty miles round. The building itself has eight sides and each side has a painted window, and each window shows, or is meant to show, some great deed done by a Lestrangle.

"There's one defending his Castle for King Charles. Another in red uniform, wig and pig-tail at some battle fought in America. Another dying at Waterloo. Parker says Sir Digby managed well-enough to find subjects for six of the windows, but was in a fix about the two last. He was obliged to have his grandfather being thrown from his horse in hunting, though that was rather the horse's deed than his own. And the last window is filled with the marriage of Sir Digby's parents, though what there was remarkable about that, except the funny old-fashioned dresses, I could not make out at all. Parker says—"

"Who is this Parker?" interrupted Mrs. Holdich.

"He's one of the chaps working under Mr. Slimes, the grand engineer from London, whom Sir Digby employs to do all these wonderful things. It was Mr. Slimes who threw the Chinese bridge over the river that you catch a glimpse of yonder through the trees. It was he who put up the rows of statues and made the plan of this eight-sided monument, which he calls the Val—Val, I can't for the life of me remember the name," and Ned hit his forehead to sharpen his wits.

"The Walhalla, I suppose," said Mrs. Holdich, "so called after the famous building raised by a German king to the memory of the distinguished dead."

"Oh, mother, what a deal of learning you have! No one would think that the wife of a steward could be such a scholar."

Mrs. Holdich gave a little melancholy sigh as she slowly rose and carried the books which she had unpacked towards a shelf on the wall.

"Now I must help you," cried Ned, jumping up, "that bit of a shelf won't hold half your books. The last steward can't have been much of a reader or he would have put up a bookcase. But what a lot of money he made!"

"How do you know?" inquired Mrs. Holdich, pausing in the act of putting Young's "Night Thoughts" into its place.

"Parker told me that though Tom Seton, as he called him, was steward here for only five years, yet he saved up enough to let his daughter keep her pony-carriage now. I can't fancy how he managed to do it. One thing is clear, *we* never will."

"No one could do it *honestly*," observed Mrs. Holdich.

Ned was silent for several moments, as if turning the matter over in his mind. His mother went on arranging the books in the slow languid manner which to her was habitual. At last Ned broke forth with the words, "I don't see that Seton is much the better for his money. He's laid up with a paralytic stroke and his daughter, whom he had sent to a boarding school to get her brain stuffed with French and folly, drives about in her pony-chaise, dressed as fine as a duchess, and never gives a thought to her poor sick father at home. He made the money and she spends it. If he made it ill, she spends it ill. He might have been happier had he been poorer."

Mrs. Holdich made no observation aloud, but she thought of the verse, "*The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich; and He addeth no sorrow with it.*"

"How tremendously wealthy Sir Digby must be!" cried Ned, after another silence. "Parker tells me that Mr. Slimes gets thousands and thousands of pounds for all his grand designs and that half the money spent on the Walhalla would build a splendid large church. Does it not seem a grand thing to raise such a monument as that?"

“A vain-glorious thing, I should say. It is a pity that Sir Digby Lestrangle does not know some better use for his money.”

“But I like a free open hand,” exclaimed Ned, “and Sir Digby is come of a fine old family, the oldest they say, in the county. There is something to be proud of in that. I can’t help wishing sometimes that father were something higher than a steward.”

Mrs. Holdich glanced at the bright, handsome, intelligent boy, who, to her maternal eyes, looked fit to grace any station, and again a sigh escaped her. Both she and her husband had been born to stations above those which they occupied now, and had received a superior education. To Rebekah Holdich this had been almost a misfortune, for a sense of her Robert’s not being in regard to worldly circumstances what he might have been, or what in her fond pride she deemed that he ought to have been, had given a tinge of melancholy to a disposition not naturally cheerful or hopeful.

Rebekah was ever ready to acknowledge God’s goodness towards her and to acknowledge that her blessings were beyond her deserts. She was unconscious that she was ever guilty of repining, but in the depths of her heart, unknown to herself, there was a secret discontent resembling that which a jealous-tempered child might feel on seeing a brother preferred to himself. She could not forget that her father had been a sea-captain and that a cousin of her husband was a civil servant in India. Rebekah was, in a certain sense, a pious woman. She had enough of religion to make her conscientious, but not sufficient to make her happy. The tree lived, but was stunted in growth. The jewel was not counterfeit, but it was marred by petty flaws.

While Rebekah’s mind was wandering on in the direction given to it by the observation of her son, the thoughts of the volatile boy had taken a different course.

“We shall be very comfortable here, mother, in this snug little home of our own. What with father’s salary as steward, yours as daily teacher to Sir Digby’s little girl, and what I earn by working in the garden, we shall have enough and to spare. This is a capital cottage and that big back room will look splendid when fitted up with pictures and books.”

Mrs. Holdich turned her head and glanced towards a large inner apartment which was almost unfurnished.

“That room is evidently a recent addition to the cottage,” she observed.

“Parker told me that Miss Betsy Seton managed to have it built out to have dancing parties in it,” said Ned, “she could hardly turn round in the parlor with her crinoline, hoops, and flounces. But just as the room was finished, her father had his paralytic stroke and they were obliged to leave the place altogether. It reminds one of the old proverb, ‘Fools build houses for wise men to live in.’”

“The addition to the cottage was doubtless made at Sir Digby’s expense,” said Rebekah.

“Everything comes out of his pocket, he pays for all,” cried Ned. “Sir Digby must have no end of money. And to think that this splendid estate, Walhalla and all, will go to one sickly crooked little girl!”

“Have you heard anything of her?” asked Mrs. Holdich, with natural interest in one who was to be her pupil for two hours in each day.

“They say she’s a wretched little creature, no bigger at six years old than she should be at three, and that the doctor here makes a regular fortune out of her. She lives upon medicine and never gets better upon it. The doctor says that her ankles are weak, so running and skipping are strictly forbidden. The doctor says she must be kept to strict diet, so to touch fruit or sweeties is not to be thought of. She’s as crooked as a comma, so to pull her straight, she’s jammed into an iron frame and wears it both night and day. I would not lead the life that

this poor little girl is leading, no, not to be the heir of all Sir Digby's estates, and," added the boy with a merry laugh, "to have all the eight windows of the Walhalla filled with my mighty exploits at the last!"

"Poor little child!" sighed Mrs. Holdich. "I hope that her father loves her fondly, to soothe so sad a lot!"

"Parker says that Sir Digby thought mighty little of his daughter, as long as he had a son. The boy was a splendid child and his father was very proud of his beauty, and declared that he would prove a worthy Lestrangle. He died about two years ago and that broke his poor mother's heart, and then Sir Digby, in his trouble, turned his thoughts to his crooked little girl. He had no other child left to love. But he's too proud and full of himself to love any one much, I fancy. He's so puffed up with his dead forefathers that he can scarcely stoop to think of a living child!"

"Is it from Parker that you have learned all this?" asked Rebekah.

"Yes, he's no end of a talker," replied Ned.

"Then let me warn you, my boy, not to be too intimate with him. There seems to me to be a kind of treachery in a servant's exposing the faults and laughing over the follies of a master. In being all submission in his presence, eating his bread, taking his wages, and yet freely talking over his private concerns, even with perfect strangers."

"Parker is not Sir Digby's servant," replied Ned, "but of course he gets all his knowledge from the Castle. The great man would be somewhat amazed could he hear what is said in his servants' hall. From what I have learned today, I should fancy that he keeps a jovial, rollicking set?"

A shade of anxiety passed over the sensible face of Rebekah. "I do not wish you to mix with them," she said, "you are too young and thoughtless to be exposed to the temptations of such company."

"Young and thoughtless!" repeated Ned, with as much of ill-humor as that bright face seemed capable of expressing. "You are always so full of fears! Why, I am fourteen years old and my father was battling his own way in the world long, long before he had come to that age, thrown amongst all sorts of people, and he was never a bit the worse!"

"Your father has a singular strength of character and you—" Mrs. Holdich paused, not exactly knowing how to finish her sentence.

"It's not the way to make a fellow manly, to keep him always in leading-strings and dandle him like a baby!" muttered Ned, kicking his heel against the carpet, perhaps as a symbol of kicking against maternal authority. "You would treat my mind as poor little Missy Edith's figure is treated, cramp me up, kill me with kindness, make me afraid to see my own shadow! One can't in a world like this be kept from every breath of temptation!"

Mrs. Holdich made no reply to her son. She was conscious of being of an anxious temper, somewhat inclined to meet misfortune halfway, nervously sensitive to any peril which might threaten those whom she loved. But the mother felt that apprehension was not unreasonable here. She had from various sources received an impression that in the service of Sir Digby Lestrangle, her son would be thrown into the society of those most likely to lead him astray. Ned was young, light-hearted, and thoughtless. He had no mistrust of himself. Life was to him like a sunlit sea. Little knew he of shifting quicksands or treacherous rocks below.

"One great comfort is," reflected Rebekah, as she slowly ascended her cottage staircase with a bundle of linen on her arm, "Ned will be under his father's eye. Robert well knows the temptations of such a life. Has he not proved them all? And who amidst sunshine or storm could steer a straighter course than he! But then he is so silent and almost stern, he cannot

understand boyish folly! He is himself so free from every weakness that I could sometimes almost wish—no, no, I could not wish Robert to be other than he is! Ned respects his father and loves him. I hope one day,” it was rather a wish than a hope, “that he may resemble him also!”

## Chapter 2

### Husband and Wife

“One effort more must be made! I cannot leave this corner of the vineyard entrusted to my care, uncultivated and neglected. There are souls here for whom I must give account! Oh, Thou in whose hand are the hearts of all men, strengthen me now for this most discouraging part of my work!”

Such were the meditations of Henry Eardley, the pastor of Axe, as he trod the primrose-bordered path across the park which surrounded Castle Lestrange, which lay at the furthest bound of his parish, full five miles from his church. Absorbed in thought, the clergyman raised not his eyes to gaze on the fair scene around him—verdant knolls and fairy dells, where the violet loved to hide. Woods clothed in the robe of light feathery brown which young spring loves to don, ere it brighten into emerald hue, varied here and there by the vivid green of an early budding larch. The grass was silvered with daisies and spangled with yellow buttercups.

Far away the horizon was bounded by soft hills, blue in the distance. The song of the blackbird in low mellow sweetness, breathed the voice of spring, but if the clergyman listened to the melody, it was not with pleasure unmixed. He was drawing a contrast in his mind between man and the world he dwells in—nature glorifying the Creator, man living for self and sin!

Mr. Eardley was an earnest, hard-working parish pastor, who threw the whole energy of his soul into the work which his Master had given him to do. He had been permitted to see fruit from his labors. Earnestness had supplied the place of eloquence. He beheld his church thronged with listeners and in cottage homes the pastor was received like a father. There was but one corner of his parish in which Henry Eardley never found a welcome and that was the part where fell the broad shadow of Castle Lestrange.

Three or four times in the year, the splendid carriage of Sir Digby would roll up to the door of the church and the baronet with proud, stately step would march up the aisle to the square family pew, drawing upon himself as he did so the gaze of the congregation. He looked as if conscious that his presence conferred honor on the place of worship, and probably only came for the sake of showing an example to those beneath him, or from respect to guests who might be accustomed to regular attendance at church. That proud knee was never bent in adoration, nor did that haughty lip ever utter a prayer. The clergyman, in preaching before Sir Digby, had ever to wrestle down the feeling that a critic and not a poor guilty mortal was listening to the message which he gave.

And Mr. Eardley, on such occasions, could not but notice that the gay liveries of Sir Digby's servants were never seen within the church. The footmen loitered without in the churchyard or reveled in some tavern near. The clergyman had reason to believe that of the baronet's numerous household, not one member ever entered a place of worship.

How was the evil to be met? How was spiritual instruction to be given that was evidently despised? Yet the less such knowledge was valued, the more must it be needed. Mr. Eardley, overcoming his natural reserve, called at Castle Lestrange. The baronet merely sent

a card in acknowledgment of the visit. A cold intimation that only the bare forms of courtesy were to be observed between the great man and the clergyman.

The pastor, after much prayer and reflection, ventured upon a step more important. He wrote to the baronet, regretting the distance which divided the Castle from the church, and offering to conduct weekly services when and where Sir Digby might appoint. This letter received no reply.

Mr. Eardley heard such accounts of the disorders which prevailed in the baronet's household that he felt it at last to be his duty to use all his influence to prevent young members of his flock from entering into service at Castle Lestrange. He had found from painful experience that when they did so, his modest country maids became bold, flaunting girls, his late Sunday-scholars never entered again the church which they once had frequented. He at last learned to regard the Castle as a kind of stronghold of the enemy, into which if any of his flock should wander, they would be lost to him forever!

A less earnest man than Henry Eardley would have given up as hopeless any attempt to win souls in so unpromising a field. Why not confine his teaching to those who would hear him gladly, and leave the worldly and worthless to follow the path of their choice? But conscience answered such a suggestion with the thought, "Does a duty cease to be a duty because to perform it is painful? Was Jonah blessed when he shrank from delivering his warning to a guilty city?"

After a sleepless night, the clergyman resolved on visiting Sir Digby's steward, whose dwelling was situated at the distance of about a hundred yards from the Castle. But if the pastor had been received with cold indifference at the lordly mansion, at the cottage he was met with positive insult. Seton, a man who had but one object in life, that of making money by any means, fair or foul, was little likely to welcome one who regarded the interests of the soul. He actually shut his door in the face of the minister of the Gospel!

When this miserable man was struck down with the illness which deprived him of the stewardship which he had unfaithfully filled, Mr. Eardley again sought him out, in some faint hope that the heart, lately so hard, might be softened by heavy affliction. Sympathy at least might be shown, if counsel would not be received. Struggling against his repugnance to expose himself to the risk of repeated insult, the minister once more stood at the door of the steward's dwelling. He knocked twice, no one answered the call. On a third summons, a frizzled head and painted face were thrust forth from an upper window, and Seton's daughter bade him take himself away, no parsons were wanted there!

With a heavy heart, Mr. Eardley returned to Axe, and for some weeks he only sought to dismiss from his thoughts a subject so full of discouragement. He could do nothing, he need attempt nothing for those under the baneful influence of the Castle. But news came that another steward had been appointed, another had succeeded to Seton's place, and Henry Eardley was impelled once more to bend his steps towards that distant part of his parish. With a faint hope that Sir Digby's new steward might be a different man from the last, and that anxious efforts and earnest prayers at length might bear some fruit, the minister took his way through the fields towards the place which, notwithstanding its natural beauty, appeared to him the one waste barren part of his parish.

"After all," reflected Mr. Eardley, "the more of neglect, insult, and contempt a minister is called upon to endure, the more his lot resembles that of his Master!"

While crossing the park by a small public footpath, Mr. Eardley saw at a short distance a man with pencil and paper in hand, engaged in examining some felled timber. The man was not very tall in stature, but powerfully built, the firmly knit limbs and broad shoulders giving an impression of strength which a nearer approach confirmed. Mr. Eardley was struck by the

thoughtful, almost stern expression of the stranger, who, intent on his occupation, scarcely observed the clergyman's approach.

"Here is one who will be firm in good or evil," was the mental comment made by Mr. Eardley, as he surveyed the broad overshadowing brow, compressed lips, and massive jaw, denoting endurance, of the man who stood before him.

"I think that I am not mistaken in supposing you to be Sir Digby's new steward?" said the clergyman with courteous address.

The man raised his steady brown eyes and gave a slight sign of assent.

"I am the minister of this parish." Holdich respectfully raised his cap.

"I regret," continued Mr. Eardley, "that the Castle is so distant from my church."

Holdich made no observation, and the clergyman continued, after a somewhat embarrassed pause, "I have often thought that it would be well if I could hold one or two short week-day services near to the Castle, to enable those to join in social worship whom distance may prevent from coming to Axe."

Still Holdich continued silent, but his eye lightened up with an expression so pleasant that Mr. Eardley was encouraged to proceed.

"Some years ago, I delivered a course of very simple lectures on the history of David, illustrated by colored engravings (*The Shepherd-King of Bethlehem*). I have some thought of commencing another on the life of Daniel the prophet, concluding each lecture with prayer. I have not yet, however, succeeded in finding any place near to the Castle where such short service could be held."

"My cottage would be open, sir," said Holdich, "but I cannot answer for the attendance of anyone beyond my own family."

This, the first word of hearty encouragement which he had ever received from a dweller on the baronet's estate, was welcome to the clergyman as the first note of spring. "Do you give me to understand," said he, "that you will allow me to hold cottage lectures twice a-week in one of your rooms?"

"Gladly," was the brief reply.

"You are a stranger here," said Mr. Eardley, feeling it ungenerous to take advantage of what might be the steward's ignorance of the difficulties of his new position, "you are probably not aware—I would speak in all charity, but I must not conceal the fact, that you may draw some ill-will on yourself by thus openly aiding efforts of a minister of religion."

Holdich slightly smiled at the hint, as a sailor might do if warned that he might expect some stiff breezes during a voyage.

"I am not even assured," pursued Mr. Eardley, "that you might not loose ground in the favor of Sir Digby."

Holdich drew in his lips with an expression which seemed to say that though Sir Digby was lord in the Castle, the steward would be master in his own cottage.

"Few words here," thought Mr. Eardley, "but plenty of quiet decision."

"Were you going on to the Castle, sir?" inquired Robert Holdich.

"No," answered the clergyman, who had had small encouragement to repeat his visit.

"Then will you please to go and rest in my cottage, sir, yonder. My wife will always be glad to see you."

Mr. Eardley accepted the frank invitation, which a long walk had rendered more welcome. He was not accompanied to the door by Holdich, who at once resumed his survey of the timber, which his short colloquy had interrupted.

As Mr. Eardley proceeded towards the cottage, he caught a glimpse through the foliage of the Walhalla, girdled with scaffolding, and the harsh sounds of the workmen's hammer and saw fell noisily on his ear.

"How little," thought he, "from such sight and sound can we judge of a goodly building on which is lavished expense and labor. Far less can we judge of God's designs, as the costly fabric of His church is slowly raised in an evil world. We feel disappointed, mistrustful, discouraged, for we look upon the outward scaffolding, we listen to the disturbing din, we forget that beneath all this the good work is surely progressing, and that one day we shall see order and beauty brought out of seeming confusion, when all that is now unsightly shall be taken forever away."

The steward's cottage had been built with regard to pictorial effect. Thatched roof, overhanging eaves, diamond-paned lattices gleaming through twining creepers, made the dwelling look one of the most attractive of England's rustic homes. As the clergyman walked up to the door, it was suddenly thrown open and two of the maids from the Castle, without bonnets, and flauntingly dressed, came laughing out of the cottage. Both looked surprised and somewhat startled at his unexpected appearance.

"La! It's the parson!" giggled the elder, as she hurried past the minister, her long curls streaming in the wind. The younger turned away her face, which was crimson, and hastened after her companion.

"Marion, I would speak with you," cried Mr. Eardley, in an anxious, almost pleading tone. Only a year before he had prepared that young girl for confirmation. She had received communion and she had often been in his prayers. He had anxiously sought an opportunity of reminding her of those truths which she once had loved.

But Marion would neither listen nor stop. There was no one else on earth whose presence would have been so unwelcome to her at that moment as the minister, whose voice recalled to her holier and happier days.

With a deep sigh, Mr. Eardley entered the cottage, after tapping gently at the door. He found Mrs. Holdich alone, and her quiet but ready welcome was a refreshment to the minister's weary spirit.

Rebekah appeared still in the prime of life, a comely, graceful woman, with dark brown hair neatly braided, and a manner of greater refinement than could have been expected in one holding her position. The first glance at her modest and sensible face strongly impressed Mr. Eardley in her favor. The second glance somewhat modified that impression. The brow, lined and furrowed, told perhaps only of care, but the slight, restless movement of the lips might indicate fretfulness of temper. There was not the neatness in the room which appeared in the person of Mrs. Holdich, but this might be accounted for by her recent arrival at the cottage.

Mr. Eardley seated himself on the chair placed for his accommodation, and after a few words of introduction, told Rebekah of his interview with her husband, and of the little arrangement agreed on regarding the lectures. A look of satisfaction passed over the care-worn face of the steward's wife.

"I'm sure, sir, we shall be very thankful for any religious privilege. Robert and our boy will walk over to church on Sundays, but I have not strength to go so far, and from my childhood I have been accustomed to attend the service twice. When I came here," added Mrs. Holdich, sadly, "and found how far we were from a place of worship, and amongst what a godless set we must live, my heart just sank within me. It seemed as if we had been landed in some South Sea island, with none but heathen around, and I wished that we had never come to such a spot!"

“But since you have come, Mrs. Holdich, may we not hope that it has been through the leading of Providence that has brought you to this place to make you a blessing to others?”

The furrows on the fair brow only deepened. “I shall have nothing to do with the people here if I can help it,” replied Mrs. Holdich. “Except during the two hours which I am engaged to spend in teaching the little girl at the Castle, I shall shut myself up in my home, and not mix with any belonging to Sir Digby Lestrangle.” There was a little—but a little—of peevishness and pride in the tone of the steward’s wife.

“Might you not, in thus acting, be neglecting opportunities of usefulness, failing to fulfil the very purpose of the Almighty in placing you here?” said the clergyman.

Mrs. Holdich fidgeted with the strings of her apron, and looked perplexed at the turn which the conversation was taking.

“Remember, my friend,” pursued Mr. Eardley, “that the highest Authority spoke of God’s people as *the salt of the earth*. Is it not the very characteristic of salt to help to preserve from corruption, and must it not, for that purpose, be brought into contact with that which is of a different nature from its own? If your position, education, scriptural knowledge, place you above the household at the Castle, do they not increase your power to influence, and with it the responsibility which such power must bring?”

“What can I do?” sighed Rebekah, “what influence could either my words or example have over such giddy gossiping creatures as those whom curiosity brought to my cottage today? I’m sure I hope that neither of them will darken my threshold again.”

“And yet,” said Mr. Eardley with feeling, “one of them is a girl for whom, not twelve months since, I had every reason to hope. I have seen her tenderly nursing a dying mother, who is now, I trust, in glory. I have seen Marion’s eye glisten at the thought of meeting her parents in heaven. That young creature has a warm, loving heart, a conscience that once at least was tender. If she has not resisted evil influence, if her faith has not stood firm under trial, is that reason sufficient for giving up as hopeless all attempt to lead her back to wisdom and to God?”

“What can I do?” repeated Mrs. Holdich, but in a less desponding tone. She was struck and touched by the anxious earnestness expressed in the pastor’s words.

“I would only pray you to be on the watch for an opportunity of dropping a word in season. You, a woman and a mother, can scarcely be at a loss what to say. There will be times when poor Marion will yearn for the maternal kindness which once she knew—then sympathy will be welcome and counsel may have its effect.”

“I might possibly persuade her to come here and attend your lecture tomorrow,” said Rebekah, after a little reflection.

“Be assured,” pursued Mr. Eardley, as he rose to quit the cottage, “that no effort, however small, to guide into the way of truth the wandering lambs of His flock, will be forgotten by the Good Shepherd. Let us work for Him, with Him, in Him, looking to Him alone for success.”

With very different feelings Mr. Eardley wended his homeward way from those which he had experienced scarce an hour before. He had fulfilled a duty to which he had had a strong repugnance, and had found, as we constantly find, that duty brings its own reward. A door of usefulness had opened before him where he had feared that the way was hopelessly closed. He had found followers of the truth in the place which had so long seemed to him a very center of evil. Joyous now to the minister sounded the mellow song of the blackbird, and he stooped with pleasure to gather the wild-flowers that bloomed at his feet.

“Who can say what, with the blessing of heaven, one Christian family may effect here?” reflected the clergyman. “The wife seems to have intellect and feeling, and if I have any

power to read a countenance—courage and energy lie under that quiet exterior of the husband. But it will be no easy task for them to swim against the tide of evil. That manly fellow will need all his moral ‘thews and sinews’ to stem the current before him.”

### Chapter 3

#### The Gilded Cage

“It’s a sin and a shame, it is, to go a-bothering the brain of a little titmouse like that with learning!” exclaimed Mrs. Bateman, the head nurse and despotic ruler in the suite of apartments devoted to the heiress of Lestrangle. She was a large, portly woman, with a voice “less used to sue than to command,” and looked like one who had enjoyed the good things of this world—a little perhaps to excess.

On a sofa reclined a little child, propped up with velvet cushions. Her frock was of delicate muslin, trimmed with the costliest lace. Her slender neck was encircled with a coral necklace, the only colored thing about her, for the cheek of the little heiress was almost as white as her dress. Edith Lestrangle seemed much younger than she really was, if only the small slight figure was regarded, to which the iron in which she was encased gave a stiff, unnatural appearance. Very tiny were the almost transparent fingers, small and delicately formed the hand. But the features had a sharpened outline, with nothing of infantine roundness. And the large, dark, wistful eyes scarcely wore the expression of childhood. Old, prematurely old, looked Edith, as if worn by care or pain. A ruddy-cheeked, bare-footed cottage girl might have pitied the little heiress, though the large doll beside her was dressed like a queen, and her favorite canary warbled his lay through the bars of a silver-gilt cage.

If flowers had strewed the path of Edith, they were not the fresh flowers of spring, the innocent delights which nature scatters before the footsteps of the young. They were rather the products of the jeweler’s art—neither soft to the touch nor sweet to the sense. Wealth and rank may gratify ambition, but the child-heart yearns for happiness, and to it “love is the honey in the flowers of May,” and its sunshine is the smile of affection.

“I hope that the teacher will be kind,” murmured the little child, rather as if speaking to herself, or to the canary on which she was gazing, than as addressing the nurse at her side.

“Kind!” echoed Mrs. Bateman, with the little scornful toss of the head, by which she was wont to give emphasis to her words, “as kind as the wolf is to the lamb! Everyone says that there Holdich is a bear, who would as much knock ye down as look at ye, and I’ll be bound his wife’s no better. Bless you, how them teachers go on!” continued the nurse, vigorously poking the fire, as if to exemplify by the action the merciless stirring up of intellectual flame in the brains of unhappy pupils. “One can’t look in the papers any day without seeing some horrid case of a schoolmaster or a governess beating a child to a jelly because it couldn’t take to learning.

“There was one case, I remember, somewhere in Wales—or in Norfolk—where a poor thing was heard crying and screeching, and nobody minded, ’cause they was used to it, ye see. And at last some one came in and found her on the floor a-gasping and a-dying, ’cause she could not do her multiplication!” and to heighten the dramatic effect of her story, Mrs. Bateman threw down the poker on the fender with a clang which made her listener start.

Poor Edith looked aghast at the thought of what might be before her, and half envied the little bird, that could peck its seeds in peace.

“If Sir Digby wanted to make a scholar of ye,” pursued the indignant Bateman, “why didn’t he get a real, thorough, out-and-out lady to teach ye? A French governess, now. There’d be

something genteel in the notion of that, and he need not be minding the cost, but a vulgar, low-bred steward's wife—”

There was a little cough, as of someone who wished to give notice of her presence, and turning round the stout nurse perceived a stranger entering the room. Mrs. Holdich's usually pale face wore a heightened color, and there was a womanly dignity in her manner as she advanced into the apartment.

“La! Now, listeners never hear good of themselves!” cried Mrs. Bateman, with an awkward attempt to carry off confusion by insolence. And she bustled out of the room, slamming the door behind her, to go and send off to London a large parcel of “missy's *worn-out* clothes,” which, as she told the purchaser, were “as good as new, with not a stitch broken in the lace.”

Rebekah Holdich, who was of a nervous, sensitive temperament, was so much fluttered by the rudeness of her reception that for several minutes she felt unable to speak, and in silence she removed her bonnet and shawl. Edith, who regarded her new teacher much as a prisoner might regard a familiar of the Inquisition, dared not lift up her eyes, but had an indistinct perception that a tall, thin woman in gray was making preparations for the dreaded lesson.

There was nothing, however, in the manner of the teacher, as she seated herself by her pupil, that could possibly appall and Edith's fears soon yielded to the charm of words of kindness, expressed in tones habitually soft and gentle. Mrs. Bateman's warnings were entirely forgotten and the horrible stories out of the papers. Edith edged close to her new companion, and her eyes were raised—timidly at first, but soon with confidence—to the pleasant countenance of Rebekah.

Mrs. Holdich found that the training of the heiress had been entirely neglected, whether as regarded the powers of the mind or the more important education of the heart. Yet as wildflowers spring in the most secluded spot under the eye of heaven, so neglected little ones sometimes show such sweetness of disposition as suggests the idea that, while untaught by man, they are taught by the angels unseen.

“You will like to learn reading for the sake of the amusement which it brings, will you not?” asked Rebekah, who thought it well to break the ice of reserve by conversation before commencing actual tuition.

Edith Lestrangle smiled assent.

“How do you amuse yourself now?”

“I cannot run about as other little girls do. It pains me,” said the child, with the patient look of one accustomed to suffer and submit. “I look at my pictures, and play with my doll, and talk to my dear little bird.”

“You love your doll?” asked Rebekah, encouraging her pupil to pour forth her prattle on the subject usually most interesting to a child.

“Yes—I did,” said Edith, rather doubtfully, “but then—she did not love me again. I talked to her, but she would not answer. Oh, I love my bird ten times more, for he knows me, and trusts me, and comes to me!” and Edith chirped lovingly to her canary, who chirped to her in reply.

“Yours is a splendid doll,” observed Rebekah.

“Yes, I once thought,” began Edith—interrupting herself she only added, “but nurse said it was so foolish.”

“What was foolish?” asked Mrs. Holdich.

"I'll tell you about it," said Edith, confidentially. "I was driving out one day. It was a cold day, the wind blew so sharp it made me shiver! I saw an old woman in such an old dress sitting by the side of the road, with a poor little baby on her knee. Its head was bare, and it had no shoes or stockings on its poor little red feet, and it cried so—oh, how it cried! I'm sure it was crying for cold, it made me so sad to hear it!" The eyes of the little heiress filled with tears at the recollection. "And I looked at my dolly," continued Edith, "and I did wish so hard that the baby had its soft warm shawl, and its pretty blue shoes. You know that the dolly could not feel the cold. She would not mind the wind blowing sharp. It seemed hard that the baby should have only rags, and the dolly be dressed out so fine. But nurse said it was foolish to think so. She says that I'm a grand lady and needn't care for dirty beggars and their babies. But I could not help caring," murmured Edith, "if it were ever so foolish."

"May you ever have a heart to feel for the poor, dear child," said Rebekah, "and may you one day be able to go forth and help them."

"I should be afraid to go anywhere by myself," said Edith, nervously, "there are such dreadful things, you know—wolves, and robbers, and ghosts." She dropped her voice at the last word, as if alarmed at the image of terror conjured up by fancy.

"What do you know of such things?" asked the teacher.

"Oh, nurse tells me stories, and Marion, she reads them out of a book."

"What kind of stories, Miss Edith?"

"About the great wolf with the large large mouth that ate up the poor little girl, and the bleeding ghost that went up and down the passage all night, and the wicked men that killed the poor traveler, and buried him deep in the sand!" answered Edith, her small features working as if each horrid scene that she mentioned were being acted before her.

"What worse than folly—what cruelty," thought Mrs. Holdich, "to fill the tender mind of this feeble child with horrors such as these!" "And what else does the nurse tell you?" she inquired.

"Oh, she tells me—" the little one lowered her voice almost to a whisper, and pressing closer to her companion, glanced nervously round as she went on, "she tells me of the dreadful black man who will come and take me away if I'm naughty."

Rebekah kept down the expression of her indignation, and only said, laying her hand caressingly upon Edith's trembling arm, "I daresay that you are not often naughty, my dear."

"Sometimes, when the iron hurts me much, I'm cross," said the child, with a penitent air, "and last night I did get up in my bed, and peep over the side, while nursie and Marion were having their salmon and porter."

"There was no great harm in that," said Rebekah, with a smile.

"Oh, but I did it twice when nurse bid me lie down and be quiet, but I wanted some milk and water, I was so thirsty, you know."

"And nurse gave it to you, of course?"

"Nurse was too busy then with her supper," said the child, quite unconscious of the indignant emotion which she was raising in her listener's breast, "she told me I was naughty, and ought to go to sleep, and then, I think, she forgot all about it. I did go to sleep, but, oh!" the tiny hand intuitively grasped tightly, as if for protection, the one which rested near it, "I had such dreadful, dreadful dreams. The black man *had* come to take me!"

"And have you never been told of the great and loving Being who watches over little children and sends His gentle, beautiful angels to guard them from every hurt?"

The large dark eyes were raised and fixed upon Rebekah's with an expression of wondering inquiry. "I never heard of that," said the child.

“Poor lamb,” murmured Mrs. Holdich, with motherly feeling, “then let my first lesson be of a heavenly Father’s love. You need fear no evil, dear child, for there is a great God above that bright blue sky, who watches you day and night, who has cared for you ever since you were born, even as the most tender mother cares for her little babe. It is He who made you, protects you, and loves you.”

The fixed gaze had never altered, and the little hand was confidently resting in Rebekah’s, but a shadow of difficulty and doubt crossed the face of the child.

“If God loves me,” said Edith Lestrangle, “why did He make me so crooked?”

Rebekah felt it a little difficult to answer the artless question. “We cannot tell the reason for all that the Lord does,” she replied, “but we must believe and feel quite sure that He does all in wisdom and love. Your own father may sometimes see things to be right for you that you can neither like nor understand.”

“Yes,” said Edith, thoughtfully, “there are my irons. I did cry so when I first put them on. I thought I could never bear them, but when papa told me he wished me to wear them, I tried not to mind them so much.”

“And did not your father love you all the while?” asked Rebekah.

A smile of singular sweetness rose to the little girl’s lips. “Papa always loves his Edith,” she said, “and his Edith always loves him.”

“And you believe that whatever he does he intends for your good. You can always trust him?” asked Rebekah.

“Always,” said the child, with emphasis.

“It is thus that you must love and trust God, your heavenly Father. He never can be unkind, and He never can make a mistake.”

“I do like to hear about Him,” cried Edith, “and I do like you to talk to me so. I wish that you stayed here all night. Can’t you live here like nurse?”

“What! and leave my cottage—and my husband—and my own dear boy?” cried Rebekah.

“I should so like to come and see you in your pretty little cottage?” said Edith.

“I hope that you will come and I will show you all my pretty things—my stuffed birds, my feathers, and my pictures. And when you can read you shall see the nice story-book which was given me when I was a child, all about four little robins that lived in a nest in an orchard.”

“Oh, that will be famous!” cried Edith, before whom a new vista of delights seemed to be opening. “I want to visit you very, very soon. Can’t I come tomorrow at three? That’s the time when I always go out.”

“Hardly tomorrow,” said Mrs. Holdich. “I expect at that hour the kind clergyman, Mr. Eardley, who comes to teach us to be good.”

“But mayn’t I be there too?” cried the heiress, with sudden eagerness, “I want to be made good too, and to hear more about God, who cares for the little children.”

“I don’t know—I doubt,” began Rebekah, who was by no means prepared for a step so decided as that of inviting to a religious service the heiress of Castle Lestrangle.

“I will ask papa’s leave first, you know. Oh, won’t you have me? I’ll sit so still. I won’t make a noise,” pleaded the little girl. “I don’t think Mr. Eardley will mind me, for he’s so kind. Marion has told me how good he was to her poor, sick mother. I want to see him—do let me come!” Edith put her little arm caressingly round her new friend, and looked brightly into her face.

A firm step was heard in the corridor, then the door was thrown wide open, and in entered Sir Digby Lestrangle himself, followed by the smiling, obsequious nurse.

The baronet was a splendid specimen of a man, of towering height and commanding presence, he seemed as if formed by nature to look down on all around him. Rich brown hair curled closely round a head which might have formed a sculptor's model for that of Mars, save that instead of the straight Grecian nose, his rose to aquiline height. Mrs. Holdich, as she rose on his entrance, thought that she had never before beheld so grand or so formidable-looking a man.

Sir Digby was seen to advantage at that moment, for he was gazing down with kindly pleasure on his little daughter, who scrambled from her sofa to greet him with as much speed as her feebleness and fetters would allow.

"Why, Edith, I have not seen you with such a color or with such a bright smile for years," said the father, raising and kissing his child. "I think that your lessons must have been all play!" and he turned his keen scrutinizing gaze on Mrs. Holdich, mentally passing a favorable judgment on her pleasing manner and appearance.

"Oh, papa, I like them—I mean I like her so much! And I want to go tomorrow at three to her cottage to hear the kind man teach us to be good."

"What does she mean?" inquired Sir Digby, addressing himself to Mrs. Holdich.

Rebekah was somewhat embarrassed at being required thus suddenly to announce Mr. Eardley's lectures. She rather timidly replied, that the clergyman was coming to her house to explain the history of Daniel.

"And mayn't I be there too, papa?" pleaded Edith.

"You!" cried the baronet, gaily, "why, you would understand what was going on no better than your canary-bird there would do. You are making giant strides in your education, if you mean to pass on at once from A B C to theological lectures!" and being in first-rate good humor, the baronet laughed at the notion. It pleased him exceedingly to see animation in his usually languid and listless child.

"I might not understand, but I would try. I might make out just a little. May I not go, dear papa?"

"Oh, go by all means!" exclaimed Sir Digby, "tomorrow or whenever you like. Mrs. Bateman or Marion shall take you."

If Sir Digby had turned suddenly round and caught sight of the expression on the face of the old nurse, it might have surprised him as much as his words had startled her. Mrs. Bateman dared not utter a remonstrance, but she looked daggers at Mrs. Holdich. She saw a formidable rival in the quiet, gentle-looking woman, who appeared, as if by a spell, to have won the heart of the little heiress.

Sir Digby did not remain long. His visits to the nursery were usually brief, and he had only come at this time to satisfy himself that the appearance of the new teacher accorded with the very high character which he had received of her as well as of her husband.

"She will do," was his mental comment, "the child takes to her at once. It was time to place with my daughter one of superior manner and education to Bateman—faithful, devoted, old creature that she is!"

When left alone with her pupil, Mrs. Holdich proceeded to give her first lesson in reading, interspersed with a good deal of conversation. Edith, with her artless prattle, revealed more and more of the deceitfulness, ignorance, and selfishness of the "faithful, devoted" old nurse, to whose care she had been almost exclusively left.

Mrs. Holdich did not confine her instruction to reading. Seeds of precious truth were dropped into the rich soil so ready to receive them. Rebekah was forcibly reminded of the

command to *receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child*, so unhesitating was the faith, so pure the joy with which the “good tidings” were welcomed.

“And is it one o’clock, and must you go!” exclaimed little Edith, whose young heart was opening like a spring flower to the kindly warmth of the sun. “I wish that Marion had forgotten to bring in my dinner!”

“We shall twice meet tomorrow,” said Mrs. Holdich, bending down to kiss with motherly tenderness her pale little pupil.

Small arms were clasped round her neck, and Edith whispered, too softly to be overheard by the girl who came bustling in with a tray, or the sour-featured nurse who followed behind, “I won’t mind going to bed tonight. I’ll shut my eyes and say over and over the pretty verse which you’ve taught me until I fall fast asleep. I won’t be afraid of any black man.”

With fierce jealousy in her bloated face, Mrs. Bateman looked after the retiring form of Rebekah Holdich, whom she regarded as an enemy and supplanter. “Go to her cottage indeed,” she muttered, “I’ll see the woman hanged first! Marion, you shall take the child.” And clutching hold of Edith by the shoulder with a roughness which brought a faint flush of pain to the little invalid, she rather dragged than led her to the table, to partake from a chased-silver plate of half-cold food, for which no appetite was felt.

“What misery is often endured by helpless innocents in the nurseries of the wealthy and great!” thus reflected Mrs. Holdich, as she bent her steps towards home. “That poor nestling is like her favorite—a prisoner in a gilded cage. Is there no guilt incurred by those who, by neglect, cast gloom over the sunshine of childhood, who fill tender minds with superstitious horrors, who teach those to fear whom Providence intended to love? Surely an account must one day be rendered for all the needless pain inflicted on the helpless and young, and for the deceit and evil taught when the mind, like a blank page, lies prepared to receive its first indelible impressions.”

## Chapter 4

### The Youthful Exiles

“And did your father really invite all the workmen to come to the lecture today?” asked Rebekah of her son, as she prepared her large back room for the clergyman’s reception.

“He did—I heard him,” replied Ned. “He spoke just in his plain, short way, telling them that he should work an hour later to make up for the time, and that I should do the same also.”

“It must have required some courage to speak to those men on a subject so strange to them,” observed Rebekah, who ever shrank from saying or doing what might provoke ridicule or give offence.

“I couldn’t have done it,” cried Ned. “You can’t think how awkward I felt, though I had not to come forward at all. But father went at thee business boldly—just like himself. He did not steal on step by step—feeling his way, as it were—watching to see what others would think, but he said out what he had to say, let the fellows take it as they might.”

“And how did they take it?” asked Rebekah, with some anxiety as well as interest.

“Just as they might have taken an invitation to sup upon coal-dust. Some laughed, some looked surprised, as if a lecture were a thing which they never had heard of before. One or two turned on their heels, muttering something about my father which it made me so savage to hear!”

“I fear,” sighed Rebekah, “that your father will have enemies in this place.”

“You may be certain of that,” said the deep voice of Holdich, as he entered the cottage, and hung up his cap on a peg on the wall. His wife and son had returned to the small front room, the door of which opened on the path which led towards the castle.

“Oh, Robert, have we not been imprudent, would it not have been better had we made more sure of our ground, before taking any step so decided as this?”

“Wife,” said Holdich cheerfully, “when one has a brook to leap over, ’tis better to take it at the run, than to hang doubting and delaying at the edge. A standing jump is the hardest of all.”

“I don’t think, father, that you’ll get many to follow you in your bold leap here,” said Ned, who was now standing at the open door. “I can’t see one of the workmen coming, still less any of the gold-knotted, powder-wigged swaggerers from the castle. Ah, there’s the sound of wheels! And here comes the little lady in her fairy carriage, our only guest, and she one whom we never should have dreamed of inviting.”

Rebekah went out with her husband to meet the little heiress, who appeared in an elegant perambulator, emblazoned with the arms of the Lestranges. She was wrapped up in an ermine mantle, her face expressed a shy pleasure. She seemed a little afraid of Holdich, as he bent to lift her out of her carriage, but either the kindness of his manner reassured her, or by intuition the child discovered the chivalrous gentleness which seems a part of manly natures, as the hardest steel is capable of taking the smoothest polish.

The only armchair in the cottage had been placed for Edith’s accommodation. Holdich folded his great-coat for a cushion. Marion stood behind, shy and sulky, afraid to meet her pastor, angry at being compelled thus to do so, shrinking from the thought of a searching religious lecture, as a patient might from that of the surgeon’s probe.

She almost started at the first sound of Mr. Eardley’s voice as he entered the cottage, but tried to conceal her confusion under the mask of affected indifference. Why should she care what he said? The days were past when those tones had power to move her. Why should they bring back to memory the venerable gray stone walls within which she so often had heard them, the church under whose shadow lay a grassy mound, beneath which—Marion dared not pursue the thread of such recollections—not only the form of a sainted parent, but her own holiest hopes, her own purest joys, had been buried low in that grave?

Edith had no such painful feelings to struggle with, but she experienced a sensation of awe in the presence of one whose whole life was spent in showing others the way to heaven. Timidly she glanced up at the clergyman through her long dark lashes, but that glance was sufficient to set her at her ease. No child could ever fear Mr. Eardley. She watched him as he fixed his large colored picture on the wall, and then placing her tiny hand in that of Mrs. Holdich, who had taken a seat beside her, Edith listened with curiosity and interest to the explanation of its subject.

A small assembly truly was that which met in the steward’s cottage, but Mr. Eardley remembered the promise to the two or three gathered together, and would not let his heart give way to discouragement. He saw before him representatives of the classes in which the church may be divided. The strong man walking in the fear of God and knowing no other fear. The more timid believer who, though with lingering step, treads the path towards Zion. The young joyous spirit that knows nothing of the dangers of the way, confident because careless. The child clinging in loving trustfulness to the hand that would guide it to the feet of the Savior, and the poor wilful wayward wanderer, turning back from the path of peace, yet not beyond reach of the warning call, which might yet win her back to the course of safety.

The picture represented four fair youths clad in flowing garments, reclining in Eastern fashion round a board spread with scanty fare. One with his eyes upraised, appeared to be

giving thanks. Through a half-open door behind was given a glimpse of a tempting banquet, tables heaped with a profusion of foods and large leathern bottles of wine.

### Lecture 1

About two thousand and four hundred years ago, the sins of Jerusalem and of her king drew down a heavy judgment from God. The mighty Nebuchadnezzar, king of Assyria, with his powerful armies, encamped before the city and took it. The Syrians, the Moabites, and Ammonites, rushed like ravening wolves on the prey. It was not as in the days of the good Hezekiah, when the Lord Himself fought for Jerusalem, and the tyrant who led on her foes saw his mighty host stretched low by the hand of the angel of death! Great had been the sins of Jerusalem, and Nebuchadnezzar was to her but a scourge in the hand of an offended God.

Jehoiakim was led in fetters, Jerusalem was given up to the enemy. The beautiful temple raised by Solomon was plundered of its vessels of silver and gold. They were carried to Babylon to swell the treasures of the false god Bel. About eighteen years afterwards, the desolation of Jerusalem was completed. The palace of the king, the temple of God, stately mansions, and humble dwellings were given to the flames, and those who had been spared in the first siege, were led away in multitudes to Babylon, captives to the conquering Assyrians.

***“They come from afar  
From the land of the stranger,  
The dreadful in way,  
The daring in danger;  
Before them the plain  
Like Eden is lying;  
Behind them remain  
But the wasted and dying.***

***“For strong is the bow,  
And full is the quiver;  
They rush on their foe  
Like a flood-swollen river!  
Who may stand in the path  
Of the hunger-roused lion?  
Or who bide the wrath  
Of the wasters of Zion?***

***“The weak finds not truth,  
Nor the patriot glory;  
No hope for the youth,  
And no rest for the hoary;  
O'er Judah's lost plains  
The victor's sword flashes,***

***Her sons are in chains,  
And her temple in ashes!”***

Amongst those who were carried captive to Babylon after the first siege of Jerusalem, were youths of gentle blood, one of them at least, whose name was Daniel, is said by the Jews to have belonged to the royal family of Judah. He was probably descended from Hezekiah, to whom the prophet Isaiah had foretold that some of his own princely race should serve in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar gave command to Ashpenaz, one of his princes, to choose from amongst his captives such as were fairest in face, most gifted in mind, and noblest in birth, to be brought up for his immediate service. The choice fell upon Daniel and his three young companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The three last better known by the Babylonish names which they received, those of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

While some of the Jewish exiles had to slave in a foreign land, under the galling yoke of their tyrants, before these four noble youths a brilliant career seemed to open. They were chosen, favored, honored, given a learned education. Their lot appeared to be such as might excite rather envy than compassion. Pleasure, luxury, and wealth might be theirs in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon, where the monarch dwelt, was the grandest city to be found in the world in that or perhaps any following age.

We can scarcely credit the wonderful accounts which history gives of its splendor. Its wall was said to be sixty miles round, of prodigious height, and so broad that several chariots could be driven abreast on the summit! One hundred gates of solid brass gave entrance into the city, guarded by lofty towers. Beautiful buildings rose within, richly adorned and surrounded by gardens. One magnificent royal palace was girdled by three walls, the outermost of which was seven miles and a half in compass. In its grounds rose the far-famed hanging gardens, terraces built one above another to the height of three hundred and fifty feet, each terrace covered with thick designs and planted with flowers and shrubs, so that the skill of man created a verdant hill on a plain.

Nearly in the center of Babylon rose the lofty temple of Belus, said to be the same as the tower of Babel, whose presumptuous builders had hoped to make its summit touch the very skies. The riches of this temple were immense. Treasures amounting to many millions sterling were gathered within its chambers. It seemed as if the wealth, the power, and the glory of this world were centered in the mighty city Babylon.

There appeared to be much danger that the four young Jews, in a place so full of temptations, raised to a position so likely to dazzle their judgment and inflame their pride, would soon forget the land of their birth, forget that they were exiles and strangers, and give themselves up, without regret, to the pursuits and pleasures of the heathen. Looking on the splendors of Babylon, what was there to remind them of the city of their fathers, desolate and in ruins, though one day to be honored above all cities upon earth!

But Daniel and his friends kept faithful to their country and to their God. Often they thought on Jerusalem, and longed for the time to come when once more peace should be within her walls, and plenteousness within her palaces, and when the words of the prophet should be fulfilled, *“The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

One great difficulty soon met the young Jews in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar. The law of Moses forbade them to partake of many meats that were served at the monarch’s table. They were appointed to eat of the heathen’s food and drink of the heathen’s wine, and it was

impossible that they should do so without breaking holy law. How many youths in their place would have said, "Where necessity compels, there can be no sin. We must eat, even though the food given to us has been offered to idols. Since in this matter we have no choice, let us eat, drink, and be merry. We cannot live in Babylon as we should have lived in Jerusalem. What is so pleasant to the sense, need not be painful to the conscience!"

But the pious mind of Daniel was not so easily satisfied. Young as he was, he resolved that he would not disobey the law, nor defile himself with the portion of the meat of Nebuchadnezzar. The youth presented himself before Prince Ashpenaz, with whom he had become an especial favorite, and asked as a boon that he and his comrades might live upon common grain and water, instead of the royal dainties with which they would otherwise be fed.

We can imagine the surprise with which Ashpenaz would listen to so strange a request. What—choose such prisoners' fare, instead of a rich variety of meats! He objected that thus poorly fed, his charges would lose their goodly appearance, and so draw down on himself the anger of the terrible king. Daniel was not to be lightly moved from his purpose of self-denial. "Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days," said he to Melzar, whom Ashpenaz had set over him, "let them give us beans and lentils to eat, and water to drink, then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenances of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat, and as thou seest, deal with thy servants."

The modest request was granted. For ten days Daniel and his friends partook of their homely fare, and neither did their health fail nor their resolution falter. The blessing of God was upon them, their self-denial met with the approval of Him in whose favor is life. As the end of the ten days their countenances appeared fairer than those of their pampered companions, and it was permitted to them from that time to live upon the beans and water, and keep the law of their God.

Is there nothing in this history, my friends, from which we ourselves may learn? May we not trace in those noble Jewish youths, firm in their faith amidst all the temptations of Babylon, a picture of each true servant of God? This world is the great Babylon in which Christians live for awhile, but to which they do not belong. "*Ye are not of the world,*" said our Lord. They have here their trials, their blessings, and their duties. But their thoughts, their hopes, and their hearts are fixed on the heavenly Jerusalem above, to which they will one day ascend through the merits and mercy of Christ. Strong is the contrast drawn in the Scriptures between the children of this world and the *children of light*. Let us dwell for a brief time on this beautiful name, which is given to all who are in Christ. Let us remark what renders this name so suitable, and examine our own lives to see whether we have made this title our own.

"*God is light, in him is no darkness at all,*" therefore the children of God may well be called children of light. Such were Daniel and his faithful companions. And what are the properties of natural light? It is pure—it is cheering—it is bright. Such is the nature which the Spirit of God bestows upon the redeemed. What is so *pure* as light? The ray of the sun may fall on what is loathsome and vile, but it receives no stain. Even in the the abodes of guilt, it remains unsullied and pure. Thus the young Jews, guarded by grace, remained firm amongst the faithless, true amongst the false, self-denying amongst the sensual. They were *the children of light!*

And natural light is *cheering*. What gladdens the heart like the sunbeams that change even clouds into gold? Let none say that religion is gloomy, that it casts a shade upon innocent enjoyment. "*Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say unto you—rejoice.*" Is there nothing to make life gladsome in the thought that the King of kings is our friend? That all our

debt has been paid—that all our sin has been pardoned? That whatever sorrows we may have upon earth, even these sorrows shall work for our good—that whatever blessings may be granted below, the richest and best are to come? Who would be gloomy and sad when about to inherit a crown? We may be assured that the young Jews in Babylon sat down to their frugal meal with hearts more gladsome than that Nebuchadnezzar, when the feast was spread before him. They had cause to be happy—they were *the children of light*.

And it is the nature of light to shine. It is not only *pure*, and *cheering*, but *bright*. It serves as a guide to those near it, a blessing to all around. What an example was set by Daniel, Abednego, Shadrach, and Meshach, to all the Jews in Babylon. How truly was their conduct conformed to the command, “*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*” They stood forth as witnesses for God in a worldly and wicked city. His truth shone forth in their lives, for they were *the children of light*.

Have those who thus show their faith by their works any reason to be proud because they differ from others? Oh no, God forbid such a thought! In themselves they are dust and ashes. It is only in Christ that they shine. Look at yon coal which has not yet been touched by the fire. It is dull, cold, dark, it has neither beauty nor brightness. Look at it when heated by the flame. It seems to have changed its nature. It glows, it sparkles, it casts warmth and light around. Such is the change produced on the heart when the grace of God is within it. Let the fire go out and then what remains but a heap of worthless ashes!

Is anyone here saddened by the thought, “If to be *pure*, *cheering*, and *bright*, be the mark of the children of light, I dare not count myself among them. I am so often tempted to sin—my faith is so weak—my love so cold—my conduct so inconsistent?” Yet let not such a one despair. If but one spark of God’s grace be within, that spark may be fanned by prayer to a glorious flame. Feeble may our first efforts be, but if made in sincerity and faith, they will not be made in vain. Let us ask the Spirit of truth. Let us trust in the mercy of God, and may this experience be ours, “*The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*”

But one more remark would I make on this part of the history before us. We are not, as the Jews were, forbidden to eat of various meats. It is not needful for us, as for Daniel, to content ourselves with bare grain and water. But it is needful for us to deny ourselves in anything, whatever it be, that is contrary to the law of conscience. There are many sources of pleasure or worldly profit as strictly forbidden to us as meats offered to idols were to the nation of Daniel. Our temptation, like his, may be great. Like his, may be long-enduring, but if we are children of light, we shall find, as he found, that self-denial brings a blessing, that what is given up for the sake of Christ will be returned a hundredfold in the end.

So let us live, my friends, as strangers and pilgrims upon earth, exiles in Babylon, praying for grace to keep unspotted from the world. Looking forward with hope and faith to the joys of the heavenly Jerusalem, prepared for the children of light in the glorious kingdom of their Father.

## Chapter 2 Forbidden Fruit

The little meeting concluded with prayer. After all had risen from their knees, Marion, with rather ungracious haste, hurried away her reluctant charge, muttering something about the east wind and not keeping Miss Edith out late. The girl dreaded lest Mr. Eardley should

address her, and confirm the verdict which her own conscience was pronouncing. She was in Babylon, indeed, but she had not stood forth as a witness for the truth. She was breaking God's laws every day, she was living for self and the world.

"Marion," said Edith in her soft, childish voice, half drowned by the sound of the wheels of her perambulator, "did not the good man make one wish to be one of the children of light?"

"Wishing don't do it," said Marion gloomily, glad that the child in front could not see her face.

"But might not *trying*?" suggested Edith. Marion's only reply was to push the chaise on faster.

"I like to hear the good man," pursued the child, "though I could not understand half of what he said. I can't think how we can be exiles in Babylon, for no cruel men ever came to carry us away from our home. Did you understand that, Marion?"

The girl did not choose to reply, so Edith, after waiting a moment, went on.

"I liked when the clergyman knelt down, and clasped his hands together, and made that beautiful prayer, begging God to give us His grace. Do you think that he meant to ask it to be given to a little child like me?"

"A child can do right or wrong as well as others," said the maid, whose heart added what her voice did not utter, "if ever I knew God's grace, it was when I was a little child."

This reply set Edith thinking, and Marion was thinking also. The young servant felt very unhappy. The simple cottage-lecture had brought forcibly back to her mind many things which she had well-nigh forgotten. Even thus had Mr. Eardley spoken by the deathbed of Marion's mother, of a heavenly Jerusalem, a home above! The whole scene in the little cottage rose before the mind's eye of the girl. The low pallet-bed and the wasted form upon it, the thin hand resting on the patch-work quilt, the first primrose of spring in a broken cup. Marion had brought the flower to gladden the dying eyes which would look on the green fields no more!

Memory recalled the look of sympathy with which Mr. Eardley had regarded the sufferer, and the low gentle tones of his voice as he read sweet words of comfort from the Bible resting on his knee, while the sunshine streamed in on the page. Marion remembered that time of tribulation almost with feelings of regret. She had been very unhappy then, but was she happier now? Had she not known more of peace in that lowly cottage than in the castle of Lestrangle? Was not the narrow path safer to tread than the broad one on which she had entered?

Marion's conscience had been disturbed. The young servant had been but too willing to believe that she must do as her companions did. That it was vain to dream of acting differently from the rest of a godless household. That she was too young to stand aloof by herself, and that following a multitude she could not go far wrong. But Marion had just heard this dangerous error refuted from Bible history. Daniel had dwelt amongst sinners, abhorring and shunning their sin. All the luxuries and temptations of Babylon had not drawn him away from his God. He had not trodden the beaten path, he had not travelled with the crowd. Even in early youth, he and his captive friends had braved the scoffs and reproaches of men.

While Marion thought upon their faith, a wish crossed her mind that she too could walk in the track of these children of light, but then she shrank from the cost. What! give up her worldly pleasures, the flattery and praise that she loved. Put aside her vanity, her love of dress, be scrupulously honest where nothing would be missed, and truthful where truth was counted as folly? No, the sacrifice was too great. Marion would rather risk her soul than make it!

Her painful reflections were broken in upon by the little heiress, whose mind had been rambling on in the new direction which it had taken, applying the story of the four Jewish youths to those amongst whom she dwelt, and wondering whether anything on earth could induce Mrs. Bateman to fast for one day upon grain and water.

“Marion,” she said, “do you think that Mrs. Holdich is one of the children of light?”

“How should I know?” answered the girl, who, forgetful of east wind and cold, was wheeling her charge round the lawn, instead of going direct to the castle.

“She seems so good and talks about holy things, and says we should never be afraid, but,” added Edith with a little hesitation, “she does not look happy and cheerful, like one of the children of light. The clergyman said that they should always rejoice—did he not?—but even her smile is sad, and her forehead has so many lines and creases. I’m afraid that she is not happy, though she lives in that sweet little cottage.”

“Perhaps her husband treats her ill,” suggested Marion, not sorry by gossip about others to change the current of her own reflections.

“Do you think so?” said Edith, with an expression of innocent wonder, “he does not look at all as if he would.”

“If it is not that, I do not know what she has to trouble her,” said Marion. “She has a capital cottage, good wages, easy work, and a son with the pleasantest pair of merry blue eyes as ever I saw! But perhaps she’s given to grumbling. There be some folk as cannot live without a grievance, and if they don’t find one, they make one.”

There was more of truth in the girl’s observation regarding Rebekah than either she or the object of it was in the least aware. Mrs. Holdich had been given a path through life more free from thorns than usually falls to the lot of women, yet it could scarcely be said that she had known much of real enjoyment. Rebekah had been an only and much-indulged child, the idol of her widowed father. In his home her affections had been fostered, high principle implanted, and a right direction given to her mind, but in a thousand petty ways she had suffered from the want of a mother’s judicious training. Rebekah had grown up like a hot-house plant, well-watered but never pruned, she needed discipline to draw out her energies and correct her latent self-will.

Early in life Rebekah had been united to one who had secured her deep affection. The beauty, the talents, the virtues of the youthful bride were the theme of general praise. None doubted Robert’s future happiness but those who most thoroughly knew the girl whom he had chosen. Gradually Holdich became aware that whatever valuable qualities Rebekah might possess, she had not all of those which contribute to the happiness of home.

He, punctual himself as the dial, had a wife who was always too late. He, possessing the organ of order, was annoyed at the careless untidiness which now prevailed in his dwelling.

A spirit brave, cheerful, and resolute, that had struggled through many a trial, scarcely understood the nervous, almost melancholy temper of one who had never known a great sorrow. Robert had begun his married life with a determination to make his wife happy, and he was surprised as well as disappointed at discovering that to do so lay not in his power.

Fretted at her mismanagement of household affairs, her indolence and want of method, the husband had exerted his authority to correct the faults which he saw. Rebekah was almost broken-hearted when she beheld the first shade of displeasure on the brow of her husband. His first word of reproof cut her sensitive nature to the quick. Wholesome would have been the pain had it made the young wife rouse herself to break off the habits of years, and resolutely set to the task of learning how to satisfy her husband's reasonable wishes.

But either the habits were too strong or her resolution too weak, or Rebekah deemed that her failings were such as might be overlooked or forgotten. Instead of making a brave, cheerful effort at amendment, Rebekah almost cried herself ill at the thought of having displeased her husband, and the sight of her tears gave Robert a pang closely resembling remorse. Had he been too hard upon her, had he expected too much? Conscience might be satisfied, but affection persisted in asking the question.

Several times was the little domestic struggle renewed. It always ended in tears on the part of the wife, but not reformation. Robert might have broken in a haughty spirit, or subdued a violent temper, but he could not overcome the passive resistance of an untrained indolent mind. He at length gave up the attempt in despair. He resolved to be indulgent, he wished to be blind. He tried to believe that Rebekah's faults were only such as belonged to her sex, that if she was weak, mistrustful, unmethodical, it was simply because she was woman.

So seldom now did an impatient word betray the husband's annoyance, that Rebekah had scarcely an idea what a constant trial her infirmities inflicted. A trial not less real because its pressure was constant and usually borne in silence. She little guessed how very far acquiescence was from approval, or how in many almost imperceptible ways she frittered away the comfort of one dearer to her than life.

The self-denial required of Rebekah was very different from that from which Marion shrank. She had no strong passions to subdue, no sinful pleasures to resign. She was a gentle, loving, pure-minded woman, whom slander itself could not wound, but she had not yet learned the full extent of a Christian's duty, "*Adorning the Gospel in all things, not slothful in business, serving the Lord.*"

The little heiress and her maid now returned to the castle. Any scruples which might have been raised in Marion's mind by the lecture were dissipated, as on her entering the nursery Mrs. Bateman came smiling to meet her with a small plate of strawberries in her hand. The sight of such fruit at such a season made the girl utter an exclamation of surprise.

"La! Where could these come from?" she cried.

"From the hot-house, of course," said Mrs. Bateman, "them be fit for the Queen!"

"And are they for us or—" the girl naturally enough glanced at the heiress.

"Ford brought them. You know best why he brought them and who he wanted to get them," said Mrs. Bateman with a nod and a meaning look which Marion answered with a silly

conscious giggle. "He said he was sorry as he couldn't spare us more, but he'll get two guineas a pound for what he's sending to London."

"Will he spare any for papa?" asked Edith, and the naïve question whether the master of the Castle might eat any of the fruit of his own hot-house, made Marion burst out laughing. Mrs. Bateman did not seem to see the joke.

"I say," she observed, looking hard at the maid, "little pitchers have long ears, and we must mind what we're after, now that that woman comes every day dangling about the nursery. The child has been well taught not to bother her father with gossip, but there's no saying what the steward's wife might manage to get out of the silly thing. Mind you, missy," she turned with a threatening air towards poor little Edith, "we must have none of your chitter chatter and tittle tattle with that 'ere Mrs. Holdich. If you tell her one word of what I says, or what I does, I'll get the black man to carry you off, and—" Mrs. Bateman looked round her in search of something to give more force to her threat, "I'll wring the neck of your dicky—I will!"

"Oh no!—please, please don't hurt him—my poor little bird!" pleaded the baronet's child.

"Then you be mum, and don't talk nonsense, and keep to you're A, B, C. We won't have no tales out of school." The exhortation might have lasted longer, but the sound of a horn and the clatter of hoofs were suddenly heard below.

"It's the hunt—the hunt!" exclaimed Marion, and as the nursery windows did not command a view of the road, eager for a sight of the scarlet coats, the girl ran out of the room.

"I'll have a look too!" cried Bateman, "there ain't a prettier sight, to my mind, than all the horses and dogs." And at a slower pace the nurse followed her more nimble companion.

Edith, to whose pleasure neither of them gave a thought, remained behind, with the plate of strawberries.

How tempting, how irresistibly tempting looked the soft, red, delicious fruit to the eyes of the little child! Might she not venture to taste them?—one or two would never be missed. Had not Bateman herself said that they were fit for the Queen? Half rising on her tiptoes, for the sickly child was yet "hardly higher than the table," Edith put forth her tiny hand, and touched one of the crimson berries.

Why was the hand then slowly, timidly withdrawn, as though she dared not take the ripe fruit? Had Edith heard a step in the passage, or was the fear of the mysterious "black man" before the poor little girl? No, Edith was thinking of the four Jewish youths, who had lived upon prisoners' food rather than disobey the law. "*They* would not have touched them," she murmured to herself, "they gave up everything nice because they would not do wrong. And the great God in heaven was pleased. Does He not see me now? Does He not wish little Edith to be like the children of light? I won't look at the fruit any more. If I look I am sure that I can't help tasting. I'll talk to my dicky instead," and with simple faith and obedience the little girl turned away from the table.

It was a childish victory over a childish temptation, but who shall estimate the importance of the first triumph of principle over inclination, the first effort of genuine self-denial? The seed of the Word had fallen on the little one's tender heart, and already the shoot of promise was shown in simple obedience.

## Chapter 6

### The Dream

“Where is Ned, why is he not here? We must see that he is regular at the lectures,” said Holdich to his wife on the day on which Mr. Eardley had appointed to come again to the cottage. There was a little displeasure in Robert’s tone, for he had resolved to train up his son in habits of regularity and punctuality resembling his own, and any apparent breach of either annoyed him.

“Don’t be vexed with our boy,” said Rebekah, “it is no fault of his if he chance to be a little late today. I sent him to Axe for some tea.”

“The grocer’s cart was at the Castle this morning. With a little forethought you might have prevented all need for sending so far.”

“One cannot remember everything,” said Mrs. Holdich, in a tone of languor, “there is so much to think of when one settles in a new home.”

She had found time to read almost through an amusing library book and to write three long letters for the post. But then these occupations were *interesting*, grocery matters were not. Holdich knew that a little method and management would have enabled his wife to fulfil all her duties with ease, but Rebekah had not the organ of order, or rather she had not the self-denial needed to give duties their proper place.

“You will remember, Rebekah,” said Holdich, “to put the cushion on the chair of the delicate child.”

“Oh, it is not ready!” replied Rebekah.

“How is that, you began it on the day of the last lecture?”

“But I have not finished it,” said Mrs. Holdich, who could have completed the simple piece of work in an hour.

Without making any remark, the steward brought his great-coat, folded it, and laid it down on the seat.

“Edith is a sweet little child,” said Rebekah, “yet I find it a disheartening work to teach her! The more my heart is drawn towards her, the more sad I feel it to be!”

“Why so?” asked Holdich, somewhat surprised.

“Because I know that an evil influence is ever at work to defeat all my efforts. What can I do in the space of two short hours, that will not at once be undone by the unprincipled woman, and the bold, giddy girl, who are constantly with my young pupil. I see the evil beginning to work already. Edith has lost the winning frankness with which she poured out her thoughts at first. Sometimes, when full of her artless prattle, she will suddenly stop in the midst of a sentence, press her little lips tightly together, and then give a totally different turn to the conversation, perhaps by some exclamation about her bird. Not content with making her unhappy, Mrs. Bateman is trying to make her deceitful. The child is fond of me already, and loves to nestle beside me as if she were clinging to a mother, but if so much as a step is heard, instantly she draws herself away, and looks like one who is afraid of being caught in doing what is wrong.”

“Poor little dove!” said Holdich.

“What is the use,” observed his wife sadly, “in trying to instill good into a mind so surrounded by evil influence? It will be a miracle if Sir Digby’s heiress should grow up otherwise than selfish, deceitful, and worldly.”

“The more need that you should sow good seed in the springtime,” observed Robert.

“And labor in vain!” sighed Rebekah.

“Never say in vain!” cried her husband cheerfully. “God can send His rain and His sunshine where He will. You are not satisfied, Rebekah, unless you can see the grain growing. Does it not grow while the husbandman is sleeping, does it not grow even when the dust and the clods are upon it, before one green blade appears above ground? The sower waits in faith—so must you.”

“But there are such things as blights,” suggested Rebekah.

“Ay, there are blights in nature, and misfortunes in life, and when they come we must bear them. But it is neither religion nor worldly wisdom to meet our troubles halfway.”

“I cannot be like you, Robert. I cannot throw off care from my mind! Your spirit was made firm like a rock. Mine like the poor vessel tossed up and down by every billow.”

“Has it not an anchor?” said Holdich, laying his broad hand gently on the shoulder of his wife.

The reproof was so mild that it could not wound. Rebekah looked up and smiled. Further conversation was arrested by the appearance in the distance of the little heiress, under the escort of Marion. Mr. Eardley, who had overtaken the little carriage, was now walking beside it, bending down to speak to the child, who replied to him with a bright, confiding glance, which showed that already she deemed him a friend.

“She has a sweet little face,” observed Holdich, as he went to the door.

“I sometimes think it too sweet for this earth. I often fear that so fragile a blossom will soon be taken from us,” said Rebekah, then sadly she added, “it might be the happiest thing for the child!”

“Nay!” exclaimed Robert Holdich, smiling at the mournful philosophy of his wife, “I hope that the child will live to be a woman, a good and a happy woman, a blessing to the neighborhood round,” and he went forth to welcome his guests.

Just before Mr. Eardley commenced his lecture, Ned joined the little party, breathless and heated after his walk, and two laborers, looking awkward and shy, as if half ashamed of being seen at a meeting, took their places close to the door.

The picture exhibited by Mr. Eardley excited the curiosity of little Edith. A monarch lay stretched in sleep upon a gilded couch with drapery of purple. Rich armor was hung on the wall and a jeweled tiara and scepter glittered on a marble table. Before the sleeper, dim as a shadow, since it represented a dream, rose a gigantic figure, with golden head, and silver arms stretched out towards the monarch, as if to threaten or to warn!

## Lecture 2

Confusion and alarm spread through the court of the mighty king Nebuchadnezzar. Whispers of anxious fear, mingled with stifled exclamations of surprise and indignation were heard from the lips of learned sages, the philosophers whom Assyria's king kept in attendance upon him. Nebuchadnezzar had asked a question which none had been able to answer, and vengeance, like a thunder-cloud, was hanging over them all!

Had the proud king consulted his wise men concerning the motions of the stars, the circling planets, or the silvery moon, Chaldea's sages would have readily answered, for from the lofty tower of Belus they watched the midnight skies. Had he questioned them regarding the wonders of science, they would not have failed to reply, for deep was the knowledge which they possessed. Nay, had he sought to penetrate the secrets of the future, they would not have stood silent before him, for the astrologers of Babylon pretended to have power to foretell things to come. But the tyrant had asked his learned men to tell him the meaning of a dream which he himself had forgotten! The vision that had disturbed him at night, had gone from his memory in the morning, but it had left an impression so deep that the king was intensely desirous to recall it. High rewards were offered to the sages, if they would bring back to the monarch's mind and explain the meaning of his dream.

There was no room for deception here! Magicians, however artful, could not impose on the king. They listened in despair to the most unreasonable demand which had ever been made on their powers. "There is not a man upon earth that can show the king's matter," exclaimed the trembling sages, "therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such a thing of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requires, and there is none other that can show it before the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

Such a reply would have satisfied any man not drunken with power and pride. But Nebuchadnezzar was so puffed up by his greatness, so unaccustomed to have his will controlled, or his lightest wish disregarded, that he was furious against the sages for not doing what no uninspired man could do. With a mad rage which entirely swallowed up justice, humanity, and reason, the tyrant actually commanded that all the philosophers should be slain! As Daniel and his friends were brought up amongst the wise men and instructed in the learning of Chaldea, the terrible decree included them. Not only masters, but pupils, were to be cruelly slaughtered, because none could recall to the king's mind the dream which he had forgotten!

But while the countenances of bearded men grew pale with fear and dismay, the face of Daniel, the young Jewish captive, was unclouded still and serene. His was the wisdom which is from above, the wisdom which can look fearlessly forth on the billows and breakers of life, because depending, in simple faith, on the help and guidance of God. When Arioch appeared, the captain of the guard, who was charged to fulfil the tyrant's cruel sentence, Daniel quietly demanded of him the reason for so hasty an execution, and then seeking the king, the youth asked but for time and promised to interpret the dream.

"A bold promise, more easy to be made than kept!" such we may well imagine to have been the whispered comment of the doomed Chaldeans, when they heard of the offer of

Daniel. "Who can recall the fleeting thoughts that have passed through the mind of another. It were as easy to bring back the glow on the sky after the sun has sunk in the west!"

But Daniel had a resource of which the Chaldeans knew not. He called together his young companions, and they united in fervent prayer to the God whom their fathers had worshipped. How forcibly are we reminded of the divine promise contained in the epistle of St. James, "*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.*" So Daniel asked and so Daniel received.

The secret was revealed to the youth in a vision of the night and he awoke with a song of thanksgiving on his tongue, "*Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are His, and He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: He knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with Him! I thank Thee, and praise Thee, O Thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of Thee; for Thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter!*"

My friends, when last we met, we meditated on the *self-denial* of the children of light. Today, let us dwell on their *wisdom*. Often in life do we find ourselves in positions of doubt and difficulty. We do not see our way plain before us, we know not what course to pursue. We are perplexed even which to choose between duties which seem to be contending. In such times—and every Christian is likely to experience such—let us remember the example of Daniel, let us ask for wisdom on our knees. God can make dark things clear. He can open a straight path before us. In his light shall we see light. The Lord will guide us with His counsel here, and afterward receive us to glory!

Daniel now went to Arioch and demanded an interview with the king that he might make known to the monarch the interpretation of his dream. Probably the captain of the guard was glad to be relieved of the cruel office of slaughtering innocent men. He went in haste to Nebuchadnezzar. "I have found," he cried, "a man of the captives of Judah that will make known unto the king the interpretation!" Daniel was admitted to an audience.

Probably a feeling of surprise crossed the mind of the tyrant, when, instead of some venerable sage full of years as well as wisdom, a graceful youth was led before him, whose calm aspect showed that he was neither dazzled by the monarch's magnificence nor overawed by his power.

"Are you able," asked Nebuchadnezzar, "to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?"

Daniel had received wisdom from God and to God alone did he give the glory. "The secret which the king has demanded," he replied, "cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers show unto the king, but there is a God in heaven that reveals secrets, and makes known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that you might know the thoughts of your heart."

We can picture to ourselves the instinctive awe with which so simple yet so sublime a declaration would inspire even the haughty tyrant. How Nebuchadnezzar would eagerly bend forward on his regal couch to listen to what should follow, his keen eyes fixed on the youthful prophet. Till, as his words recalled the king's own wondrous dream, conviction would be stamped on his mind that Daniel was indeed a messenger from God, that to him it was granted to draw back the dark curtain which hides the future from mortal view!

"You, O king," thus spake Daniel, "saw, and beheld a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before you, and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. You saw till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors, and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them. And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."

This was indeed the dream. Vividly would rise before the mind of the monarch the grand and glorious image which had appeared to him when he was sleeping, and the mysterious blow which had struck it to the earth, and laid its honors crashing in the dust. Nebuchadnezzar does not appear to have interrupted Daniel by a question, or even an exclamation, every sense being absorbed in that of hearing, as he listened in breathless stillness to the interpretation of the dream.

"You, O king, are a king of kings, for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beast of the field and the fowls of the heaven has He given into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all. You are this head of gold.

"And after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, forasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things, and as iron that breaks all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

"And whereas you saw the feet and toes, part of potter's clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided, but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with miry clay."

Startling to the proud Nebuchadnezzar must have been the words, "After you shall arise another kingdom." Who but a messenger from God would have dared thus to announce the fall of the mighty power of Babylon? In vain should the defenses of the glorious city be strengthened, its gates of brass should not shut out the foe. Its beauty, its wealth should not save it from ruin. The Medes and Persians, as the arms of silver, should succeed to the head of gold. Even they, after a while, must yield to the Macedonian power, under the great Alexander, represented by the thighs of brass. But their rule was not to endure. One earthly empire succeeds another, like billows rolling on to the beach, and there breaking in foam. The iron Romans would next bear sway, and then, as that metal was mixed with clay, so would the Romans mingle with the other races of Europe, till out of the one mighty empire,

ten smaller kingdoms should arise. We, in these later days, read in history of those events which Babylon's mighty monarch saw in prophetic dream.

But though the empires of this world and the glory of them are to pass forever away, there is one kingdom which shall ever endure, even the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. He who was spoken of by David and Peter the apostle as *the stone which the builders refused* and by St. Paul as the *chief cornerstone*, visiting earth in the time of the Roman dominion, should gradually extend His sway over earth, till all its nations should bow down and adore Him! Thus Daniel explained to the king this latter part of his dream, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed. And the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Forasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter. And the dream is certain and the interpretation thereof sure."

Great and startling was the effect upon Nebuchadnezzar of the prophecy uttered by those young lips. The monarch fell on his face before the subject, the conqueror before the captive. "Of a truth it is," he exclaimed, "that your god is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a Revealer of secrets, seeing that you could reveal this secret."

Nor was the monarch content with words. At once the young Jew was raised to a high post in the heathen court, magnificent gifts were presented to him. He was made ruler of the province of Babylon and a chief over all the wise men of Chaldea. It was to a giddy height that the young exile was thus suddenly raised, but in his prosperity Daniel was neither forgetful of God nor neglectful of the friends of his youth. At the moment when Nebuchadnezzar would deny him nothing, Daniel made request for his three companions. Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, were set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

It is not always that we see in this life piety thus openly rewarded, though, as regards the best temporal blessings, *godliness has the promise of this world, as well as of that which is to come*. But a time is coming when before angels, and archangels, before the countless multitudes assembled for judgment, honor, glory, and immortality will be accorded to the faithful of the Lord. He whose blood has washed away their sins, He whose grace has purified their nature, will then give them the crown of life, which He has promised to them that love Him. Then the lowliest of the children of light will hear those transporting words, "*Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*"

## [Chapter 7](#)

### The Tangle

Holdich might, since his marriage, have been called a prosperous man. He had reached a position of trust, not indeed high in respect to his birth, but one which an orphan, beginning

life penniless and almost friendless, would have been unlikely to attain to without energy, perseverance, and strict integrity. Mrs. Holdich often indulged a secret wish that her husband's abilities had found exercise in a wider field, but he himself never seemed to regret that he had not made one of the struggling crowd that choke up the way to preferment in each of the "liberal professions."

Holdich was useful, independent, and therefore contented. Ambition was no part of his nature. If he could lay down his head on his pillow at night, satisfied that the duties of the day had been faithfully discharged, no restless yearning for higher things disturbed his quiet repose.

But since his arrival at Lestrange, Robert Holdich had found duty wear a more repulsive aspect than mere hard work could have given it, and the cares of the day would sometimes intrude on the peaceful rest of the night. As he sat one morning in his little parlor, with a pile of papers and tradesmen's books before him, an expression grave even to sternness, rested on the face of the steward. Holdich's first care had been to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the position of Sir Digby's affairs, and day after day he had been carefully going through the accounts of years. The work had been as discouraging as it was perplexing.

Extreme confusion prevailed. Holdich had found it almost impossible even to read many of the rough entries—to do so was like struggling to make out a time-worn inscription in some obsolete tongue. Soon the conviction was forced on the steward that much of the confusion had been purposely designed to perplex anyone who should attempt to bring the accounts into order. The skein had intentionally been brought into an almost inextricable tangle, and to unwind it required an amount of patience which few men were likely to possess.

Holdich had sat up late at night, he had wearied his brain, he had scarcely allowed himself time for his meals, and now the result of his labors was before him. He had discovered what he had suspected from the first, that the former steward had been an unscrupulous rogue, and that a system of bribery, corruption, and fraud had been introduced and was prevailing at Castle Lestrange, in which not only the household but the tradesmen were deeply involved. The honest spirit of Holdich revolted in disgust from the wickedness which surrounded him.

A loathsome slough of evil seemed to girdle him in on every side. How could he possibly drain off its stagnant waters?—might not any attempt to do so only injure himself? Many a man in the steward's position would have given up the idea as impracticable, would have folded his arms and tried to shut his eyes to the evil which he would deem irremediable, or would at least have winked at frauds which he could not prevent. Some would have gradually yielded to the force of circumstances, and have at last joined in the plunder of a master whom all others seemed determined to cheat.

But Robert Holdich was of different metal. He remembered that he had an account to render to another Master, and that what he did in his place of steward he must do as unto the Lord. The example of a Daniel in the court of Babylon is not only given for the instruction of the great. The same upright spirit, the same heavenly wisdom which is required by a Christian statesman guiding the helm of an empire, may be shown by the tradesman behind

his counter, the servant in his lowly place. Approving seraphs will watch with the same interest the efforts of the one as of the other, and the Savior Himself has declared, "*He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.*"

Holdich resolved to draw up in writing a short statement of what he believed to be the fair and just expenditure required by the establishment at the Castle, with a brief summary of that which had been actually spent. The enormous difference between the two calculations must, the steward thought, startle even the most careless of men. And though Sir Digby was never likely to wade through the immense mass of papers which had so taxed the patience of Holdich, he might give attention to what was brought within the compass of a single sheet of paper. Robert was also desirous that his prodigal master should see at a glance the immense sums that had already been disbursed on account of the alterations and improvements carried on by Mr. Slimes.

"No estate could stand such expenses!" thought the steward, "extravagance and corruption are eating up the kernel of his fortune, and nothing but the empty shell will be left to the poor little child. As if the wheels of his chariot were not going downhill fast enough already, everyone here seems eager to push on behind! May not one who tries to stop the horses be but thrown down and trampled on in the attempt? Well, a simple duty is before me, I must leave consequences to God."

Holdich arranged the bills and other documents on the table, took a sheet of paper and glanced round for the ink, which was kept for his use in a small black stand in the parlor. Not seeing it in its usual place, he rose, looked on the chimney-piece, the window-sill, wherever it was likely to be, but the inkstand was nowhere to be seen. This trifling circumstance was irritating to Holdich, whose mind was full of anxious thought, and whose brain ached with tedious calculations.

"Rebekah must have taken it upstairs," he muttered, "she never leaves anything in its proper place. By this time she ought to be at the Castle, but I have not seen her pass," and striding to the bottom of the little staircase, Holdich called out the name of his wife in a somewhat impatient tone. She answered the call from an upper chamber.

"Do you know what has become of the inkstand?" cried Holdich.

"I have it here, I'll—"

"Bring it down to me!" called out the husband.

"Yes, in two minutes," answered the wife.

The steward returned to his seat in no very complacent mood. Why should Rebekah, who had an inkstand of her own, delay business by carrying off his. Why should she be writing at all at an hour when she ought to be giving a lesson? More than the two minutes elapsed. Holdich passed his hand through his thick curling hair, rose again, went a second time to the door, and called Rebekah more impatiently than before.

"Just coming," answered Mrs. Holdich from above.

“Just coming,” meant coming in five minutes, for at least that time had elapsed before Rebekah’s deliberate step was heard on the stair. She entered the parlor in bonnet and shawl, with a letter for the post in her hand.

“Rebekah,” said Holdich angrily, “when will you learn that there is a proper time and place for everything?”

“Is it eleven yet?” said Rebekah, glancing at the clock beside the door.

“Eleven minutes past,” replied Holdich sternly.

“Really, Robert,” said Rebekah, who was hurt by his manner, “it is no great crime to be a few minutes too late.”

“Not unless you are habitually so,” replied Holdich, “what were you doing to make you neglect both your pupil and me?”

“Writing a little birthday ode for my father.”

“Trash and nonsense!” exclaimed Holdich, then checking himself he added, “you would have had abundance of time for that after your return from the Castle, and I must—what—you have not brought down the inkstand after all!”

“Oh, dear! I forgot it,” said Rebekah, turning to go again upstairs.

“I’ll get it—go you to the Castle—you have delayed much too long already!” cried Holdich, giving his wife as he left the parlor such a look of stern reproof as cut her to the heart. Rebekah went out into the sunshine, with hot tears gushing from her eyes.

“How harsh, how unreasonable, how unkind Robert is today,” was the wife’s unuttered thought, “had I done something seriously wrong, he could not have looked more angry. I am sure that life is too short and too full of trials for us to imbitter it to those whom we love by such impatience about trifles.”

Rebekah overlooked the fact that such trifles “make up in number what they lack in weight.” She knew the depth of her love for her husband, she believed that she would rather die than give him cause for serious displeasure, but she forgot that the galling of perpetual friction inflicts more pain than a heavy blow. It is the slow perpetual drop drop on the head which is said to produce madness at last. If Robert had given way to a burst of temper, it was after enduring fifty petty provocations so silently that Rebekah scarcely knew that he felt them at all.

She now thought her husband’s displeasure utterly disproportioned to its cause, and made loving excuses for his fault, hardly conscious of her own. “Poor dear Robert is weary and anxious, he has been working too hard of late. One must look for perfection in no one. If he never gave way to infirmity of temper, he would be too good for this world. I am sure that he will regret the pain which he has given to one who loves him so dearly.” And drying her weeping eyes, with a comforting persuasion that she was meekly and patiently bearing a trial, Mrs. Holdich entered the Castle.

“Oh, I am so glad to see you. I was so much afraid that you were not coming!” was the greeting of little Edith, her pale face brightening with pleasure, which was almost immediately clouded as her earnest eyes detected traces of tears in those of her teacher. “Oh, you have

had something to grieve you—I am so sorry—is your husband ill?” cried the child, lovingly caressing the hand of Rebekah.

“No, no one is ill,” replied Mrs. Holdich.

“Has any one been unkind to you?” asked Edith, who, child as she was, was already familiar with trial in the two shapes of sickness and unkindness.

The question asked in all simplicity embarrassed Rebekah, who was about to try to smile it away, when she caught a look of malicious meaning on the coarse face of Mrs. Bateman.

“Don’t ask no questions and you’ll hear no stories, my dear,” said the nurse, with a nod and a wink, “we all know as how some wives have a deal to put up with.”

“Such as have not the best of husbands, like me,” exclaimed Rebekah, flushing scarlet at the implied reproach to her Robert.

“Ah, well, it’s always right to stand up for one’s own. We don’t tell tales out of school,” muttered Mrs. Bateman, meaningly, as she laid her hand on the door, delighted at having found a sensitive place in the heart which she wished to wound.

Rebekah felt it beneath her to enter into a dispute with such a woman, and above all in order to defend the spotless character of her husband. But she was vexed with herself for having given any handle which malice could use, and the loving pity of the little heiress pained instead of soothing her spirit.

In the meantime, Holdich with a ruffled mind sat down to his task of making an accounting. Anything that broke on his domestic peace annoyed him more than pressure from the world without. He wrote out the accounting clear and brief, and with it in his hand proceeded towards the Castle in order to lay it before Sir Digby. Before he reached the place, however, the sound of voices from the bottom of the little mount on which, as the reader knows, the Walhalla was being erected, directed Holdich to the spot where the baronet and his architect Slimes were surveying the large bronze group which was to occupy a place on the top of the building, and which had just been conveyed to the place.

With Sir Digby’s singular personal advantages, majesty of height, grace of figure, and manly beauty of countenance, he formed a strong contrast to the form beside him, which was that of a small thin man, insignificant in appearance, who would only attract notice by his affectation of the air of a man of genius. Slimes wore moustaches and a pointed beard, and his black hair, parted down the middle, fell on each side almost to his shoulders. He wore his necktie exceedingly loose, and on his hand, which held a measuring rod, glittered a variety of rings.

Holdich regarded perhaps with a little prejudice a man who seemed to him to be acting the fabled part of the vampire, draining the life of its victim while lulling him to sleep with the fanning of its wings. With anything rather than admiration, he had walked along the avenue of statues whose insufficient drapery had offended his taste, while each represented to his eye a sum thrown away in idle extravagance. The elegant Walhalla itself, with its gilded columns and stained-glass windows, looked to Holdich out of character with the stately dignity of the gray castle, and he utterly disapproved of its erection as a monument of family pride.

The bronze group on which attention was now concentrated, was by no means devoid of spirit. It represented an old knight of the house of Lestrangle, riding over a prostrate Saracen. One of its most striking points was the strong likeness to Sir Digby, which had been intentionally given to the hero. It was the baronet himself clad in armor, wielding aloft his ponderous sword. It was Sir Digby trampling on a foe. It was Sir Digby who, from the height of the Walhalla, itself occupying a lofty site, would look down on the country surrounding, and present a conspicuous landmark for a wide circle of miles. The statue, fresh from the casting, glittered almost like gold in the meridian rays of the sun, and seemed to the eyes of Holdich like the very impersonification of human pride.

## Chapter 8

### The Warning

"I am flattered by the commendation of one of the best judges of art. I consider the favorable verdict of Sir Digby Lestrangle in itself sufficient reward for my utmost efforts." Such were the words uttered by Mr. Slimes, with all the accompaniments of inclination of the body and gesture of the hand, which could give emphasis to the expression of his deep reverence for, and high admiration of, the great man whom he considered his patron.

"That is a falsehood if ever man uttered one," thought the steward, who had come up at that moment with the paper in his hand.

Sir Digby surveyed his own likeness in glittering armor with considerable satisfaction. His pride was of that kind that claims the homage of others. He was not insensible to adulation, which he never regarded as fulsome, his own opinion of himself being so lofty that flattery could scarcely rise to its level.

"Good attitude—fine action—an imposing figure," said the baronet, as with arms folded across his broad chest, he with satisfaction examined the bronze. Then perceiving his steward, he asked him, with an air of lofty condescension, what he thought of the group.

"That it looks too heavy for the roof, sir."

The answer was by no means what had been expected. The baronet slightly raised his brows and glanced up at the fairy structure of the Walhalla. Mr. Slimes bit his lip with vexation.

"The untutored mind of the uninitiated," said he, "can scarcely be expected to pass a correct judgment upon works of high art."

"Perhaps, Holdich," said the baronet gaily, "you regret the avenue of old elms being replaced by marble statues," and he waved his hand in the direction of the broad gravel path.

There was no attempt on the part of the steward to deny what was certainly a fact, though his assent was only conveyed by a slight respectful inclination of the head. Sir Digby, unaccustomed to such candor, looked with amused curiosity at "the character" who had entered his service, but Mr. Slimes from that moment regarded the steward as an enemy.

"Had you anything to say to me?" asked the baronet, as Holdich glanced at the paper which he held in his hand.

"If you are at leisure, sir, I should wish to speak to you on some business."

"When you have served me longer, Holdich, you will learn that there is nothing on earth that I hate like the name of business. I do not care to be referred to upon every trifling occasion."

"The occasion is not trifling, sir," said the steward. There was something in his quiet decision of manner which arrested the attention of his master. Sir Digby had always lived amongst cringing menials, and obsequious satellites, and to see a dependent who could look him full in the face with respect but without any fear—a man who could not flatter or fawn, had the pleasant effect of novelty upon the mind of the spoiled child of fortune.

"I will give you five minutes," said the baronet, and turning he strode towards the castle, followed by Robert Holdich.

Sir Digby entered his study, threw himself down on a large easy chair covered with crimson velvet, and glanced over the paper, while his steward stood at a short distance from him.

"So, this seems all satisfactory enough," observed the baronet, after a careless survey of the first page. "Things appear to have been managed as they ought to be, expenses have been less than I supposed."

"That page, sir," said the steward in explanation, "contains but my own calculations of what would be just and right. If you look at the opposite page, you will see each item set down in the same order, and will read at a glance the difference between what should have been, and what was actually spent last year."

The baronet rapidly turned his eyes to the amount summed up at the end of the second page, and uttered a hasty exclamation of surprise. He then looked down the column of items, glancing quickly from one page to the other to compare relative amounts, a mixture of wonder and indignation appearing on his features as he did so.

"There has been gross mismanagement here," he exclaimed.

"Worse," said Robert Holdich.

"What a rogue, what a consummate villain that Seton must have been!" muttered the indignant baronet, "the gallows would have been too good for such a fellow."

"He was not the only defaulter," said the steward.

Sir Digby, with frowning brow, continued reading to himself, and muttering as he read. "*Wine merchant*—why, my cellar was replenished but last year, it is impossible that half can have been consumed! *Warming the hot-house, a hundred pounds—household expenses*—why the sum is absurd! Had I three times the number of servants, it would not account for such lavish profusion. One would think that my household had been replenished from Newgate. You must be in error—your statements cannot be correct!" he added, turning almost fiercely to the man whose revelations were so unwelcome.

"I can only refer you, sir, to your banker's book," replied Holdich.

"And Slimes,"—Sir Digby was again examining the paper, "these charges are enormous, the estimate is greatly exceeded. Fifteen thousand pounds since last July!"

Holdich made no observation. He had placed a statement of facts before his master and left it to work its effect.

"It would be but justice if I were to turn off the whole gang!" muttered Sir Digby, startled by the sudden glimpse of the gulf of ruin towards which he was speeding. He rose from his seat and with long strides paced up and down the apartment, then stopped suddenly short before Holdich, "What's to be done?" he demanded.

"I should say, sir, make no further improvements in the grounds, and let Mr. Slimes return back to London."

But pride rose in arms against the suggestion. "What!—leave the works incomplete! No, no, that's out of the question. I never yet began a work which I did not finish. My place will be the finest in the county. Slimes may be extravagant, profuse, but he has genius, undoubted genius!" and Sir Digby as he spoke turned towards the bay-window which commanded a view of the Walhalla.

"A genius for flattery," thought Holdich, "I am no judge of how he works on bronze or marble, but I have no doubt of his talent for working on the weaknesses of others."

Sir Digby remained for several minutes plunged in thought, his hands behind him—his foot moving restlessly up and down—his eyes fixed on the building before him, but with an appearance of abstraction. Then, as one who suddenly awakes from sleep, he turned sharply round and faced Holdich.

"I can't be plunging everything into confusion, making a clear sweep of my establishment," he cried, "and just at a time when the castle will be full of visitors to witness the opening of the Walhalla. If I am to make changes, where am I to begin—and where to end? Lemoine I had from Paris. Whatever he be as a man, there is no doubt of his qualifications as *chef de cuisine*. My table is the envy of those who lead in the highest circles in England."

Sir Digby paused, but as Holdich attempted no comment on his words, he went on with increasing vehemence, as if to overpower his own reason with arguments drawn from his pride.

"Such an establishment as mine cannot be maintained without expense. I have never been one to count shillings, or grudge the outlay required for noble objects. I know my position in the county. It is not for me to bend my mind to matters of pounds, shillings, and pence. That is your office—not mine."

"What are your wishes, sir?" inquired Holdich, whose object was to draw some definite instructions for guidance from his master.

"You must manage," said Sir Digby evasively, willing to shift responsibility, although not by any means to transfer power, "you must keep a sharp eye on the accounts, you must let these fellows feel that there is someone on the watch, that no one can defraud with impunity."

"But am I empowered to—"

“Certainly not empowered to disorganize my establishment, or to dismiss my servants,” said the baronet, drawing himself up to his full height, as if he felt that his rights were invaded.

“Do I understand rightly, then, that I am simply to continue to lay before you, as I have done today, statements regarding expenditure over which I have no real control?”

Sir Digby bit his lip and looked impatient. “I must not be perpetually troubled,” he replied, angry at so disagreeable a subject as that of his own extravagance and the corruption of his household being forced upon his attention. “I shall, of course, examine closely into everything at some more convenient season, to do so now is utterly impracticable, and I will not, without due examination, turn off at the recommendation of any man every menial in my service!”

Before the baronet had concluded the sentence the door had opened, and Valance, the portly butler, had entered to announce that a visitor was in the drawing-room. The man stood half petrified by the startling words which he had overheard. He could hardly recover his self-possession sufficiently to say that Sir Rowland Bates was waiting.

The baronet, relieved by the interruption, immediately went to see his guest, and the whole conversation between him and Holdich might have seemed to have left no impression on his mind, but for the remark which he smilingly made to his visitor, when they came on the subject of servants, that he himself had a treasure of a steward, as honest as he was disagreeable.

But in that conversation words had been spoken which one person at least would never forget. Valance, as his master passed forth from the study, darted at Holdich a glance of unutterable malice, suspicion, and hatred. The glance was calmly met by one who was conscious of no cause for shame. Holdich had simply done his duty and would shrink from the eye of no man.

“I see that I am in the position of a chained watch-dog,” thought the steward as he quitted the Castle. “I can but give notice that thieves are abroad to a master who is more angry with those who break his repose than with those who plunder his property. Had I not to look to a higher Master, and do all things as unto Him, I should be inclined to let events take their course, and not incur enmity for the sake of a man on whose support I never can reckon.”

Before going home to partake of his noonday meal, Holdich remembered that he had some business to transact with Ford, the head-gardener. As he went in search of him, the steward, on passing a greenhouse, heard voices behind it engaged in animated conversation, and in the second that spoke he recognized that of his son.

“He rules both you and your mother like slaves,” exclaimed Parker with an oath.

“He does not!” cried Ned, echoing the oath, to give force to his indignant denial.

“My son, remember who has said, *Swear not at all*,” said Holdich, with grave earnestness, as he passed the speakers.

“The old Methodist,” muttered Parker. “I wonder now,” he added, as Holdich had walked beyond earshot, “I wonder that a lad of spirit like you can stand being put down like a child!”

“My father was right,” said Ned, with a little hesitation.

“Oh, you’re one of the meek and saintly ones, I take it,” there was sneer in the speaker’s tone, as if to be meek and saintly were the same as to be spiritless and silly. “I don’t believe now that you’d dare to have a spree without express leave from your dad. He’d clip you into something as formal and close as yon yew tree there by the wall, which mayn’t so much as shoot out a twig in any natural way.”

It is needless to detail the conversation that followed. Holdich, strong in his integrity, and fortified against temptation, might resolutely face the enemies by whom he was surrounded, but there was one weak point on which he might be attacked with good hope of success—one point where a blow might be inflicted which he would keenly feel. If his young son could be led astray, if guilt or shame could be fastened on him, the sword would pierce through the parent’s heart. Ned’s companions were well aware of this, and Robert Holdich was by no means insensible to the danger.

“This is no place for Ned,” he reflected. “His mother and I had hoped to keep him beside us, but his welfare must be our first thought. Never before did I hear an oath from his tongue. Who can touch pitch and not be defiled? I must talk over the subject with my wife.”

Holdich looked up and saw the whole sky covered with dull, threatening clouds, that bending down towards the earth rendered the air thick and close, while they shut out the beams of the sun, and darkened the landscape with their shadow. Though little subject to mental gloom, Holdich at that moment felt his spirits in unison with the weather. Clouds seemed to be gathering thick above him. He knew that hatred and opposition must be his daily portion, that malice would be on the watch for opportunity of revenge.

His own home was not bright. His wife, with all her love and her virtues, was rather a trial than a helpmeet. And his son, his well-beloved, was becoming a source of anxiety and care. But Holdich cast from him oppressive doubts, as Manoah’s son wrenched his strong arms from the cords that bound him. *Take no thought for the morrow* was a command which he sought to obey with the simplicity of a child. It was not mere natural energy and courage bracing the spirit for trial, but that faith in Almighty wisdom and love which overcomes the world. No one who passed Holdich on his way to his cottage would have guessed what lay beneath that calm, serene aspect, or have guessed how earnestly the soul within was engaged in silent devotion.

“It would be a sore trial to Rebekah to part with Ned. They have never yet been separated for a day,” thought Holdich, as he strode up to his cottage door. It was more repugnant to him to wound the feelings of his wife, to call on her to make a painful sacrifice, than would have readily been believed by those whose knowledge of his character was slight. Something of abruptness and decision in his manner had given color to the slander that Holdich played the tyrant in his home.

Robert found Rebekah engaged in laying the table for dinner. He greeted her with peculiar tenderness, both from self-reproach for having been betrayed into roughness in the morning, and from regret for the necessity of inflicting any further pain.

“You look pale, dear wife,” said he.

"I have had a trying morning," replied Rebekah, her lip quivering with emotion, "that woman spoke of you as—as I can never bear to hear you spoken of—setting even the child against you."

Holdich smiled. "If Mrs. Bateman had formed a bad opinion of me," he said, "there is no need to confide the same to my wife."

"It was partly my fault," stammered forth Rebekah, who never concealed anything from her husband. "But who would have believed that my words and my looks would be wrested to use as weapons against you!"

"Ah," said Holdich, understanding at once the nature of the accusation, "she thought me hard on you, Rebekah."

Rebekah turned her glistening eyes upon her husband, and only murmured, "It was so unjust."

"Nay," said Robert, thoughtfully, "we may often learn more from our enemies than from our friends. I lost my temper this morning. I'm sorry for it." He held out his hand to his wife. She put her arms round his neck and his rough coat was moist with her tears.

"Oh, Robert," she said, "I am certain that great troubles are coming upon us! As I was leaving the Castle today, Valance the butler met me. There is something in that man that I shrink from. He came up with such an insolent air. And his face—oh, the malice expressed in each feature! 'Tell your husband,' he said, 'that I know what I owe him and,' he added with a curse, 'I'll take care to pay him!' and he clenched his hand, and looked at me as if he could have struck me to the earth."

"I will walk with you to and from the Castle tomorrow," said Holdich, "and I'll be bound that Valance will give you no annoyance."

"It is not that," said Rebekah, with agitation, "it is that I am sure that he hates you, that you have offended that wicked man, and that in some way he will be revenged. Everyone seems to hate you, though you never wronged a creature in your life. I tremble even for your safety."

Holdich smiled at her alarm. "Never fear for me," said he, "I hope to live down hatred. I have merely stirred a nest of hornets, and may have to bear a few stings. My anxiety, Rebekah, is lest, in the society of such companions as he has here, Ned may be led away from the right."

"Such was my fear from the first!" exclaimed Rebekah, breathing a weary sigh.

"The, perhaps, you will see with me that it would be well to accept the offer repeatedly made by my brother, and send Ned to Wales without further delay."

The offer to which Robert referred was one made by James Holdich, a schoolmaster, to let Ned at once complete his own education under his roof, and assist in teaching the younger pupils. Holdich would have accepted the offer as soon as it was made but for the strong opposition of the doting mother, who could not bear the idea of a separation from her only son. Even now, though sensitively alive to the disadvantages of Ned's remaining near Castle Lestrange, Rebekah could not reconcile her mind to the trial of parting with him.

"What!" she exclaimed, "would you take from me my child—the only joy of my life? That would be worse than all."

“We must consider his best interests,” said Holdich.

“Oh, Robert, don’t speak of it now. I have had enough for one day!” cried Rebekah, again giving way to tears.

Holdich dropped the subject for the time, though inwardly resolved to follow the course which reason approved. Rebekah’s own good sense, he trusted, nay, her very affection, would lead her to forego the opposition which only rendered his own duty more painful. Rebekah was, ere long, bitterly to repent that she had regarded her own inclinations rather than the wishes of her husband or the welfare of her son. That however anxious to act as a Christian, she had in this matter shown neither the self-denial nor the wisdom of the children of light.

## Chapter 9

### The Fiery Furnace

Ned did not make his appearance at the following lecture. Holdich and his wife were annoyed at the absence of their son. The pale little heiress was there, under the escort of Marion. Holdich noticed that the manner of little Edith was changed towards him. The child regarded him as the cruel man who made his wife unhappy, and who, according to nursery gossip, had been known even to strike her. Edith stole timid glances at the steward when his eyes were turned in another direction, to see if she could read in his face any signs of his cruel disposition. The tender heart of the little girl was full of pity for her teacher. “And I like her all the better,” thought Edith, “because she never complains.”

Mr. Eardley’s picture represented Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego standing before the king of Babylon, with the fiery furnace in the distance, glowing in lurid flame.

## Lecture 3

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was three-score cubits and the breadth thereof six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

It has been imagined by some that the proud monarch had had an image of himself cast in gold, that the people might fall down and adore it. It has been also suggested that he caused it to be made all of one precious metal, in defiance of the unwelcome prophecy contained in his dream. Gold had been the type of the Babylonish empire. Gold had been succeeded by silver, iron, and brass. Nebuchadnezzar had his image formed entirely of gold, to show that the might of Assyria should endure throughout all generations. As the idol was

lifted up on high—for the height mentioned must include the pedestal—so the proud monarch would be raised above all other mortals, that the world might wonder and worship!

Then a herald of the king cried aloud, “To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time you hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up—and whoso falls not down and worships shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

This was the command of the most powerful monarch upon earth. In opposition to it stood the command of the King of heaven, “*Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, nor in the earth beneath, nor in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them.*”

Terrible to the eye of sense was the burning fiery furnace, terrible the wrath of the powerful tyrant! Who would dare, in simple obedience to the Word of the unseen God, to endure the devouring flame or brave the fury of Nebuchadnezzar?

We know not where Daniel was at this period of trial. Perhaps he was absent in some distant part of the empire. Perhaps he was confined by sickness. We feel assured that he never bent his knee to the image raised in the plain of Dura.

Is there anything in the position of Christians now in which we can trace any likeness to that of the exiles in Babylon, called upon by a tyrant to bow down to his golden image? Are we not told in Scripture that covetousness is *idolatry*? And is not *the love of money*, the worship of Mammon, the prevailing sin of our age? Not only the great and mighty, the princes, governors, and captains, are tempted to make gain their idol, and sacrifice to it their peace of mind and their conscience. This golden image is worshipped by the multitude of the people.

How eager, how unscrupulous in the pursuit of gain, do we find the merchant at the Exchange, the shopman at the counter, the hawker wheeling his barrow, the servant in his post of trust! It seems as if the whole world were eagerly speeding in one direction, each man jostling his neighbor in his eager haste to reach the shrine of Mammon, to bow down before the golden image which Sin has set up! Who can number the crimes of which covetousness is the source? The frauds, the falsehoods, the flatteries—treachery in the household, deception in the trade, petty pilfering, and open violence. Man’s law broken and God’s law condemned!

Against this worship of Mammon, the children of light must boldly stand forth. They must faithfully keep themselves from idols. What though they may be threatened with the fiery furnace of poverty and trial, God, the God of their fathers has promised to help and protect them. “*He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes....he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.*”

Loud was the crash of music which announced to the multitudes assembled on the plain of Dura that the hour for worship had arrived. Groveling in the dust at the sound, down fell the princes, counsellors, and rulers. Three forms alone stood erect! Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego, the servants of the living God, would not fall down and worship the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

What courage, what faith, was required thus to stand alone in the midst of a prostrate crowd! The Jews were young, had been raised to high position. Life may have been as sweet to them as to us. Their souls would shrink like ours from contempt, and pain, and the thought of a terrible death. Satan would as readily suggest to them, as he does now to us, reasons for sparing themselves. Might they not plead *necessity* for breaking one law of God? "We must live," says the seller on Sunday. "We must live," cries the fraudulent dealer. With how much more force could the three young Jews have urged the pleas, "We must live!"

No trial which the Christian is likely to be called upon to bear, for the sake of conscience, is half so terrible as that which was presented to these Jewish youths. And they had not, as we should have, the love of Christ that constrains, the remembrance of what He endured, to make them count all things but loss in comparison of His favor. In their days, the Lord of glory had not suffered and died, leaving them an example that they should follow His steps. Their knowledge was less than ours, but was not their faith much greater?

Tidings were soon carried by envious lips to the tyrant, that the three young Jews whom he had favored had disobeyed his command, and would not bow down to his idol. Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego should be brought before him.

"Is it true," he demanded in fiery indignation, "do not you serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now, if you be ready that at what time you hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the image that I have made, well. But if you worship not, you shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace, and who," added the proud monarch, "is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

See the three young exiles depicted there, facing the fury of the king in the various ways in which noble, but differing natures, would meet a trial such as theirs. Shadrach with clasped hands, and eyes upraised to heaven, as if his piercing faith could already see a Deliverer coming in the clouds, is replying to the angry tyrant, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king!"

Meshach, with firm, fearless gaze, returning that of the monarch, his hand instinctively clenched, as if to give force to his words, joins in with that sentence which speaks no expectation of deliverance from fire, but resolution to be faithful unto death, "But *if not*, be it known unto you, O king! that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up."

Abednego stands beside his companions with folded arms, and eyes bent upon the ground, his face more pale than that of the others. His faith, perhaps, may not rise to the belief that he shall be saved from the flames, his courage may not be roused like the lion's to grapple with the fear of man or the terrors of a violent death, but he is as strong in his meek submission as the noble youths at his side. He is ready to do or to suffer what the Lord his

God may appoint. *Faith, courage, submission*—these in the hour of trial are the graces bestowed by the Spirit of God on the children of light.

Nebuchadnezzar was not touched by the youth, nor struck by the heroism of his young captives. They alone of all men had dared to oppose his will, and his vengeance should hurl them to destruction. In a transport of fury, the tyrant commanded that the furnace should be heated one seven times more than it was usual to be heated and that the most mighty men in his army should bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and cast them into the flames.

Can we realize the feelings of the martyrs when they heard the horrible command, when the tight cords bound them hand and foot, and powerless even to struggle, they were borne towards the furnace, whose glowing, suffocating heat would reach them, even from a distance! You see it there as a shallow pit, filled with burning fuel, on which pitch and resin have been thrown till the red flames leap and curl, as if impatient to devour their victims. Do we wrong the young heroes if we believe that it was a terrible moment to them, that faith had a hard wrestle with doubt, courage with fear, and submission with the instinctive love of life! Oh, cruel were the eyes of the tyrant that could, without relenting, see the brave defenseless youths dragged to the fiery ordeal!

It is over!—the martyrs are plunged into their bath of fire. The men who have thrown them in, find the heat too intolerable to be endured—they stagger, gasp, fall, perish! Poor wretches that had bowed down before the golden image, they had sold their consciences to their king. Their hour is come, the flames kindled for others have destroyed the ministers of vengeance themselves!

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, “Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” They answered and said, “True, O king!” “Lo!” exclaimed the wondering monarch, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

Yes, the Savior Himself was with the young Jews in the furnace. Scarcely had the fearful plunge been made when the martyrs, with unutterable transports of joy, found that the fire had no power to burn them—it could destroy nothing but the cords which had bound them. Free, uninjured, and exulting stood Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, with the flames like a shrine of red crystal around them, in the realized immediate presence of the Lord! The intensity of their happiness must have resembled that of the blessed in heaven. The mind can scarcely conceive it. Had they dreaded the furnace? Lo, the furnace itself was their throne of glory! The moments spent there the brightest, holiest, happiest that they ever could know upon earth.

And though we look not for miracles now, how many of the children of light have drawn comfort from the promise contained in Isaiah! *“Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle on thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior.”*

How many in the hot furnace of affliction have found the presence of their gracious Redeemer so comforting and supporting, that they could say in the words of St. Paul, "*We glory in tribulations!*" And if this be so in those sorrows which are the common lot of all men, how much more in those which Christians, like the exiles in Babylon, endure for the sake of conscience. "*Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy,*" said our Lord, "*for, behold, your reward is great in heaven.*" If we have never given up anything for the Savior, if we have never endured anything for our God, we may well ask ourselves whether we be not amongst those who have escaped the furnace only by bowing to the idol. "*Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*"

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the furnace and cried aloud, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God, come forth and come hither."

Perhaps no command of the king had ever been less willingly obeyed. Yet the three young Jews came forth and approached the Assyrian monarch, who received them with admiration and wonder. The courtiers crowded around to examine the garments of the heroes. Their linen was unsinged, not a single hair on their heads had lost its gloss, no smell of burning had passed upon them.

"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," exclaimed the conquered tyrant, "who hath sent His angel, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill, because there is no other god that can deliver after this sort."

Then the king promoted Shadrach and his companions in the province of Babylon.

Thus had the three brave youths glorified God in the fires, shown forth His praise, been witnesses to His truth in the sight of the heathen. Through faith they had conquered their fears, through faith they had overcome the wrath of the tyrant, they had been led to honor through disgrace—their path to distinction and glory had lain through the fiery furnace!

Dear brethren, we may have to suffer much in this world, but let us cherish these thoughts to soften our natural shrinking from the furnace of tribulation. We may glorify God in it. We may enjoy His presence in it. Earthly bonds will be consumed in it and the faithful will not long be left to suffer in it. A voice, not of an earthly tyrant, but of a Heavenly Friend, will say at the right moment, "Come forth, and come hither!"

Of such faithful ones are the white-robed multitude whom St. John beheld in vision. "*These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*"

## Snares

“Will you not let me speak a few words to you, Marion?” The young servant-girl heard her pastor’s voice behind her, as, fearful of being detained, she wheeled her little charge over the gravel.

“Oh, stop, you must stop, it is Mr. Eardley,” cried Edith.

The breeze was so balmy, the sunshine so bright, that it was impossible to bring forward the old excuse of not keeping out the child in the cold. Marion left the perambulator and went forward to meet Mr. Eardley, in order that her charge might not overhear the reproaches which she expected. But there was no reproach, only something of sadness in the tone of the Pastor of Axe.

“I wish to talk over old days with you, Marion.”

He was not changed. There was the same gentle kindness of manner with which he used to greet her, when she curtsied on opening the cottage-gate for the ever-welcome visitor. But the girl whom he addressed had a painful consciousness of a change in herself. Under the gaze of the minister’s eye, Marion felt ashamed of the gay ribbon, the gaudy flower, which were the outward tokens of that change. In the presence of the clergyman who had prayed by her dying mother, Marion became sensible of the worldliness and frivolity which, like moths fretting a garment, were gradually wearing away all that had once given her character worth.

“I promised your mother not to lose sight of you,” said Mr. Eardley. “I am grieved never to see you at church—is the distance too great for your strength?”

“Yes, sir,” murmured Marion, fidgeting with her shawl, and wishing to make her escape.

“You could rest at the vicarage, Marion. My housekeeper would give you refreshment.”

The girl only shook her head in reply.

“I have often wished to see you,” pursued the clergyman after a pause. “I never forget the tenderness with which you nursed your good mother. I never pass her grave in the churchyard without raising a prayer for her daughter, that she may follow in the steps of her parents, and share their blessedness above.”

Marion hung down her head. A choking sensation rose in her throat.

“Do *you* ever breathe that prayer, my child? You may be distant from a place of worship, but the orphan’s God is ever nigh. In constant prayer to Him is our only safeguard in all the temptations of life. It has been well said, ‘Prayer must cast out sin, or sin will cast out prayer.’”

Marion found it extremely difficult to answer, for she was ashamed to own that for months she had quite given up her devotions. As Mr. Eardley, however, seemed to wait for a reply, she stammered forth, “In a house like ours it is quite impossible to pray.”

“Does not the history which we have just been reviewing show us that there is no place, no position in which we may not serve our heavenly Master? He who saved the three Jewish youths from the fire, can and will make a way of escape for those who share their faith and their love.”

"I can't go right against everyone about me," muttered Marion.

"Then it becomes a serious question whether a young girl like you should remain where she is exposed to influences which she feels that she has not the strength to resist. We are sometimes so placed by Providence that it is clear that our post, though one of temptation and danger, is the one appointed by God. Such was that of the exiles in Babylon. Such is that of a pious child in the home of ungodly parents. But this is not always the case. A servant is not bound to remain where she knows that a current of evil is drawing her away from her God."

"Mine is a very good place," said the girl, who had caught a glimpse in the distance of Ford the gardener busy with a bed of bright flowers.

"It may be so as regards worldly advantages, but I fear that it is not so as regards the far higher interests of the soul. To an older and more experienced Christian there would probably be less risk—to a girl like yourself I would say, 'It is wisdom to flee from temptation.'"

"Where should I go?" asked Marion bluntly.

Mr. Eardley raised his hand to his forehead in thought. "Mrs. White is looking out for a servant."

Marion would scarcely let the clergyman finish his sentence. The contrast which flashed across her mind between the plain dull home of the widow lady, with her staid elderly servant, regular hours and sober dressing, and the glare and glitter, the mirth and frolic, the luxury and extravagance of an establishment like that of Sir Digby Lestrangle, overpowered every scruple of conscience. "I don't want to leave my place, sir," she said, almost pertly, "I would rather remain where I am," and with a little curtsy to close the conversation, she turned and rejoined her young lady.

Edith had been waiting very patiently, her wistful dark eyes watching the clergyman, and a smile of gratification lit them up as she saw him come towards her.

"I did like that last story best of all!" she exclaimed, bending forward from her fairy carriage. "I was so glad—so very glad—that the fire could not hurt those brave young Jews. I was so afraid that they would be burned. But if they had been,"—Edith looked up earnestly into the clergyman's face as she spoke—"would not God have taken their souls to heaven, and made them happy forever and ever?"

"They would have been no losers, dear child," said the clergyman. "What is the short life of the body compared to the endless life of the soul? What are the passing joys of this world to those which are changeless and eternal?" The words though addressed to the little heiress, were intended rather for her maid. Marion caught hold of the handle of the perambulator, and pushing it forward, soon left the minister behind. The moment that she was beyond Mr. Eardley's hearing she said, "I'll tell you one thing, Miss Edith, I'm not going to those lectures anymore."

The child was taken by surprise. To the little caged bird the hour spent in the cottage of Holdich was one of enjoyment. Natural love of variety, the pleasure of being welcomed, the thirst of an intelligent mind for knowledge that came with all the freshness of novelty, combined to make Edith eagerly look forward to Mr. Eardley's bi-weekly lecture. "Oh," she

exclaimed, "why will you not go, when you know that I cannot go without you! Nurse never will take me!"

"Never mind why, I say I'm not going."

"Oh, but do—do—" the child's voice rose to the pitch of entreaty, tears gathered in her eyes, and she clasped her tiny hands as she spoke.

"To whom does my daughter condescend to use the language of entreaty?" Marion started at the voice and the sight of the majestic figure of Sir Digby, as he turned a corner of the path through the shrubbery. The girl was by far too much abashed by the question to attempt a reply, but Edith turned with animation towards her father, the moisture still glistening on her dark lashes.

"It was only that Marion will not take me again to my teacher's cottage, and nurse won't go either, and I can't go alone, you know."

"Alone—assuredly not," said Sir Digby, who always chose to have his daughter surrounded by those accessories which he thought belonged to her station. "If it be your pleasure to go to Mrs. Holdich's cottage, both your nurse and maid shall attend you."

Edith's pleasure was damped by a secret fear that Bateman might vent her anger on the bird.

"The day is so fine that you shall come and sit beside me," said the baronet, with an imperious gesture to Marion to lift out her little lady, "You shall tell me what makes your visits to a cottage such a pleasure, that the thought of being disappointed of them should cost my daughter a tear." The stately father stooped to raise the child in his arms, and kissed her moistened eyelid.

"Oh, many things, papa!" cried the heiress.

"Tell me some of the things," said the father, as he resumed his seat on the rustic bench which he had quitted. He placed his little girl on his knee, and dismissed her attendant with a wave of his hand.

"I like to be with Mrs. Holdich, she is so gentle and kind. And I like to see the good clergyman and hear the wonderful stories he tells."

"What kind of stories?" inquired the baronet, who had a paternal pleasure in feeling little fingers playing with his button-hole, and in listening to the silvery prattle of his child.

"Stories about the brave heroes who would rather be burned in the great fierce fire than bow down to an image."

"And what did the clergyman intend you to learn by all that?"

"Rather to die than to do what is wrong!" cried Edith, her little face kindling with generous emotion.

"Spoken like a true Lestrangle!" exclaimed Sir Digby, both amused and delighted to see what he deemed the spirit of his family flashing forth in his child. "And what else did the clergyman teach?"

This was a difficult question to be answered, and the slender finger was in and out of the button-hole before Edith was able to reply, "He told us not to want money that was not our own, and he said that servants ought to be honest, and not cheat their masters at all."

“An excellent lesson—a most admirable lesson,” laughed Sir Digby, who had a lively recollection of the unpleasant truths stated in his steward’s paper. “Mr. Eardley is a sensible practical man. I’m half inclined to send all my household to attend his lectures.”

“Oh, papa, that would be famous!” exclaimed Edith.

“Do many go?” inquired the baronet, who began to think that he might have been neglecting a useful instrument for controlling disorderly servants.

“Hardly any,” said Edith, “but Holdich is always there.”

“He’s an honest fellow,” observed Sir Digby.

“He would never have worshipped the image,” cried Edith, “if he’d seen the fierce king here, and the red fire there,” she stretched out her hands in opposite directions, “he’d have been like Shadrach—no, he’d have been like Meshach—he’d have looked the king right bold in the face, and he’d have said, ‘I’ll never bow down!’”

“You’ve a quick perception of character, little one,” said Sir Digby, greatly amused at the expressions of resolute courage on the pale little face. “You can tell already an honest man from a rogue, a bold man from a coward! I think that these lectures ought to be encouraged, they may have a good moral effect. I am well-pleased that my servants should attend them.”

“But papa, if all went would there be room? Would there be seats for them all? Oh,” exclaimed Edith, suddenly, “could not Mr. Eardley have a better place! Could he not have the beautiful Walhalla?”

Sir Digby shook his head with a smile. “No, no, that fine temple is not to be turned into a chapel of ease.”

“And it is not finished yet,” observed Edith.

“It will be finished in ten days,” said the baronet. “I have sent out my invitations to the guests who will be present at its opening on the first day of May.”

Edith looked doubtfully in the direction of the large bronze group, wondering how it would be possible to raise it to the top of the Walhalla.

“When is Mr. Eardley’s next lecture?” asked her father.

“On Tuesday,” answered the child.

“I have some thoughts of hearing him myself, and judging whether his addresses are likely to impress the lower classes,” said the baronet, feeling proud pleasure in extending his patronage to one whom he deemed beneath him. “There is no doubt,”—Sir Digby was now speaking to himself and not to his child—“that religion may have a salutary influence upon the lower orders. A clergyman who gives good moral lectures upon honesty and sobriety is a valuable member of society. This Eardley is quite the gentleman—I think I’ll ask him to dinner, and I will—yes, I certainly will countenance his next address with my presence.”

“Religion may have a salutary influence on the lower orders!” Such was the verdict of one who had never felt the need of its life-giving influence for himself. Sir Digby knew himself to be a man of high family, fortune, distinction—a man on whom Nature had lavished her favors, but he had never realized his position as a miserable sinner, a sentenced offender before God. The little child on his knee knew more of real religion, was nearer to the kingdom of heaven, than the haughty lord of Castle Lestrange.

We will return to the cottage of the steward.

“How was it, Ned, that you were absent from the lecture today?” asked Robert Holdich, as his son returned in the evening from his work.

“Well, father—really—one goes to church on Sundays—and that story of the furnace one knows so well,” replied Ned in a hesitating tone.

Holdich did not press the matter. Attendance was to be no matter of compulsion. The father went on with his occupation of calculating the amount of cubic feet in certain lengths of felled timber, but his mind would sometimes wander to the plans which he had formed for his son, and all the more from the scraps of conversation between Rebekah and Ned which occasionally reached his ear.

Mrs. Holdich sat knitting. Ned, seated beside her, was employed in making artificial flies, while his tongue rattled on gaily. The boy was more at ease with his mother than with his father. She was the repository of all his fancies and wishes. Ned was not afraid of seeing on her face the grave look of silent reproof, which on that of Holdich often spoke more than words.

“And he showed me the kennel and the stud, mother. There’s a racer there—such a splendid creature! Parker says that Sir Digby gave five hundred pounds for him last year. He ran at the Derby and only missed by a length. Parker would bet fifty to one that Speedway would have been first in, if Jack Paton had been his jockey, but the fellow on his back did not know how to manage him. Jack Paton, he’s cousin to the butler at the Castle—he’s the rarest chap that ever was seen! Parker says that he’ll soon be down in these parts. He’s sharp as a needle, light as a feather, and funny as a clown, and keeps everyone roaring with laughter. Parker had promised that when Jack Paton comes he’ll get me invited to the suppers in the servants’ hall. There’s no end of jollity there, and lots of claret and champagne.”

“My dear boy,” began Rebekah, in a half expostulatory tone, but she did not finish her sentence. Holdich looked up from his paper. “Into that servants’ hall, Ned,” he said, “with my leave you never shall enter.”

“Why, father, where’s the harm? All the chaps about here do it, and jolly good feasting they find. One cannot shut oneself up like a sulky old badger in his hole.”

“Ned, if Sir Digby’s servants waste the goods of their master, entertain guests under his roof without his knowledge and at his expense, the sin of dishonesty lies at their door. Neither I nor mine shall share it,” and again Holdich resumed his accounts.

“Hard times for me,” muttered Ned, and Parker’s sneers recurred to his mind. “My father,” thought the boy, “cannot expect to order me about like a child. Not everyone’s made of his metal. If he does not care for larks, he must not take it for granted that a young fellow like me can be kept to nothing but duty from morning till night.”

“Ned,” said Holdich, after a short interval of silence which had been only broken by the sound of his pen on the paper, and the click of Rebekah’s needles, “have you ever thought over your uncle’s offer to bring you up as a teacher?”

Rebekah paused in her knitting, and sighed. “I should hate teaching,” exclaimed the boy, “worse than anything except learning. I never had a fancy for books. As for stuffing boys’

brains and bothering my own, I pretty soon made up my mind as to what I should say to a business like that—I'd rather dig potatoes or cram geese."

"Do not make up your mind too readily, my boy," said Holdich, "your uncle could do more for you than I can. The knowledge which you would acquire under him would open for you a more useful career than any on which you can enter at this place." Holdich left his son to think over his advice and resumed his own occupation.

"Mother," said Ned, in a low tone to Rebekah, "*you* don't wish me to be sent off to Wales?"

"I could scarcely bear it," faltered Mrs. Holdich.

"Then that settles the matter," observed Ned, who was only too glad to have his mother's wishes to strengthen his own.

A doubt of the wisdom of the course which she was taking crossed the mind of Rebekah. "Ned," she said, softly, laying her hand on the shoulder of the boy, "I never wish you to leave me, but you must not draw too close—indeed you must not, with the people about the Castle. It would break your mother's heart if you ever fell into their evil ways."

"Oh, no fear of that!" exclaimed Ned.

## Chapter 11

### Evil Tidings

On the morning of the following Sunday, Holdich, on entering his parlor, found his wife in tears, with a letter in her hand, which had been left by the postman on his way to the Castle.

"Any evil tidings, Rebekah?"

"My poor father!" faltered Mrs. Holdich, as she mournfully gave the letter to her husband.

Holdich read the contents with a grave and thoughtful air. "They deal hardly by him," he observed, as he folded the letter and returned it to his wife.

"To give him but a fortnight's grace and when he was only surety for a friend! My father who paid every bill so punctually, who never could bear to be in debt—to threaten him with a prison and for a matter of thirty pounds!" Rebekah's accents quivered with emotion.

"We will soon set all right," said Holdich cheerfully, "give yourself no concern about the matter. You know that I have double the sum laid by in the Alton Savings' Bank."

"Yes, as a provision for old age, or sickness, or to start our boy in business."

"The money cannot be better spent," said Holdich, "than in setting your mind at rest, and helping your excellent father. I will write to Alton at once."

"Oh, Robert"—Rebekah's eyes were swimming in grateful tears, but her husband disliked thanks, and as if to prevent her expressing them, he turned to the table and took up another letter, which had not been opened.

"This bears the Alton postmark," he observed, as he broke the seal.

"I don't know who would write to you from thence."

Rebekah's eyes were fixed upon her husband, and she saw his brows slightly raised, as if in surprise, and then he compressed his lips, as if to stifle an exclamation. There was no

other sign of emotion, but in one so habitually exercising self-command these were sufficient to excite the anxiety of his wife.

“I hope that there are no more bad news, my Robert?”

Holdich quietly refolded the letter and replaced it in its cover. He then seated himself by his wife, and in a tone just as calm, but more gentle than usual, said, “Rebekah, how little worldly losses are in comparison to loss of health, or character, or friends!”

“I am sure that you have heard evil news,” cried Rebekah.

“The treasurer of the Savings’ Bank has proved a rogue,” said Holdich, “he has made off with the money.”

“All?” exclaimed the wife in consternation.

“All,” was the husband’s reply.

Rebekah was almost stupefied with the suddenness of the blow. It was not until she had herself read the business-letter from Alton that she seemed fully to realize its import.

“Oh, this is dreadful!” she exclaimed, “the savings of years gone in a moment, and by such baseness—such treachery! Think of all the widows and orphans whom that villain has brought to ruin! And we too—just at the moment that we most needed our money—to be robbed by a heartless wretch! It is more than patience can bear.”

“Rebekah,” said Robert Holdich, “when the Sabeans carried off Job’s herds, and the Chaldeans his camels, he looked beyond the spoilers to Him without whose permission not a sparrow can fall to the ground. With Job—and how light are our losses to his!—we must say, “*The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*”

Rebekah felt her impatience rebuked, and wiped the tears from her eyes. “It is one comfort, Robert,” she said, “that you have laid by year after year in a bank that never can fail.” She alluded to a habit adopted by her husband from his youth of devoting to charitable purposes a tenth part of his earnings—a habit which nothing had ever yet induced him to break. “It is not that I care for money,” she added, “while you and Ned are left to me, I can bear any trial of poverty, but my grief is for my poor father. If his debt be not paid in a fortnight, he will be dragged from his home to a prison.”

Robert pressed his hand to his brow in thought, while in a voice which she in vain attempted to keep calm, Rebekah Holdich went on. “He is growing old now, and feeble. The disgrace—the shock would kill him. He has none to help him but ourselves, and we—we are now deprived of the means of helping. The expenses of our move have been heavy, I have scarcely a shilling in hand, and your salary and mine will not be paid for nearly three months to come. Where can we look for aid?”

“Upwards,” said Robert Holdich.

“Such misfortunes—so close on each other, bewilder me,” sighed Rebekah. “Your difficulties, our fears about Ned, the hatred of the people around us, my father’s affliction, this unexpected loss—all seem sent at once to crush us.”

“Not to crush, but to try us, dear wife. We have known much of prosperity of late, shall we flinch from the first touch of adversity? We have needed this trial, or be assured that God would never have sent it.”

“Oh, Robert—if I had but faith!”

“You must seek it from God,” said Holdich.

“You and Ned are going to church. Oh, I wish that I could go with you! I never felt before as I feel today the need of social worship to calm a troubled and doubting heart. It is so hard to be cut off from the common privilege of a Christian.”

“Wherever a believer prays, there is God’s presence,” said Holdich.

Rebekah leant her aching head on the shoulder of her husband, and a Sabbath calm seemed to come over her spirit. She felt as if troubles shared together were drawing them yet closer to each other. It was so sweet to have him to rest on, him to consult, to tell her fears and anxieties to him. She scarcely yet knew what it was to come with the same loving confidence and simple assurance to One whose love is beyond that of the dearest earthly friend.

“But Robert, what can I write to my father?” she said, “he doubtless hopes for assistance from you—assistance which you now have no power to give.”

“We must think over the matter, dear wife. We must hold out no false hopes, and yet I cannot but think that God will open some way before us, though we cannot yet see how.”

“We would do anything,” cried Rebekah.

“And God can do everything,” said her husband, rising to prepare for his long walk to church. “‘*Cast thy burden on the LORD, He shall sustain thee,*’ it is from the weakness of our faith, not the weight of the burden, if ever we sink beneath it.”

When Holdich and his son had departed, again the heart of Rebekah gave way to misgivings and distrust. A crowd of difficulties seemed to be shutting her out from her Lord. Her faith wanted vigor to struggle through them, touch the hem of His garment, and be whole. Sighing and drooping, Rebekah Holdich looked out the Psalms and lessons for the day. She had begun her solitary reading, her mind wandering from the holy page upon which her eyes were resting, when she was interrupted by the unexpected entrance of Marion. The girl’s cheek was flushed, and her manner excited.

“Mrs. Bateman is in such a temper, I can’t stand it longer!” exclaimed Marion, as she flung herself down on a seat. “Ever since she has heard that Sir Digby will have all his people go to the lecture, she has been just like a mad dog, snapping at everyone near. What that poor child has to bear! So have I too for the matter of that!”

Marion appeared about to pour forth a long stream of complaints. Mrs. Holdich was not in the mood to listen. Her own heart was sore, her mind full of care, the loud voice and boisterous manner of her guest jarred painfully on her feelings. Rebekah laid her hand upon her open book as a gentle hint that she was otherwise engaged.

“Ah, you are going to read the service to yourself while the rest are away. That was what my poor mother used to do, when she was too ill to get to church.” The noisy tone was softened, and a sigh rose to the lips of the orphan.

“Shall I ask her to stop and read quietly with me?” thought Rebekah. Mrs. Holdich never made up her mind quickly, and before she had decided the question, Marion’s inquisitive eye had caught sight of two envelopes on the table.

“What! you had two letters at a time!” she exclaimed, “What luck! I don’t get one in a twelve-month!”

“It does not follow that letters give pleasure,” said Rebekah, with a bitter sense of the truth of the observation in regard to her own.

“You don’t look as if these had!” cried Marion, glancing with curiosity at the face on which she now noticed marks of recent sorrow. Not without something of rough sympathy, she added, “I’m afraid these have given you pain.”

Curiosity was always offensive to Rebekah, and she felt it especially so at that moment. “Many things give pain,” she remarked, with the cold reserved air of one who would silence impertinent questions.

Marion saw that she was unwelcome, and was somewhat offended by what she thought pride in the manner of the steward’s wife. “I’m not wanted here,” thought the girl, and suddenly remembering that Miss Edith would expect her at home, she rose and hurried out of the cottage.

No sooner had Marion departed than the heart of Rebekah smote her. She had missed the very opportunity which Mr. Eardley had foreseen when he had said, “There will be times when Marion will yearn for maternal kindness, and these will be the moments for making an impression on her mind.” Rebekah felt that a few kind words of sympathy responsive to the chord which had been touched in the orphan’s heart, an invitation to her to join in quiet devotions, a readiness to welcome one who came to her cottage as a refuge from unkindness, might have been the beginning of a closer intimacy which would have resulted in good.

Now Marion had gone to fritter away in idle gossip an hour which might have been spent in holy worship, deepening in her mind any impressions which her pastor’s teaching might have left. She had left the cottage disgusted with a cold reception, and perhaps laying to the account of the Christian’s “strict notions,” what was the imperfection of the woman.

Rebekah sat down and reflected. She was becoming conscious that there must be something defective in her own religion, for it neither gave her much comfort in trouble, nor made her consistent in the common affairs of life. It had not rendered her a comforting helpmeet to her husband, nor a judicious mother to her son. It had not made her perform well either her household or her social duties. She had not followed the Lord *fully*. She had but given the slow careless service of a bondwoman, not the free joyous service of a child. Had she not been sleeping on the path to heaven, and might not the very trials that oppressed her be sent to rouse her, and wake her to a sense of what it is to glorify God both with body and soul? Self-denial, wisdom, faith, had they appeared in her life. Had her course been such that the world might see in her one of the children of light?

There are too many believers like Rebekah, who by their infirmities and inconsistencies bring discredit on the cause that they love. They are conscious that they are not what they ought to be, that they are not what they wish to be, but indolence clogs them on their upward path. They settle down into a listless state, in which enjoyment even of life’s blessings becomes a scarcely possible thing. They are uneasy, they cannot tell why. Discontented, without cause for complaint, and they are singled out by the worldly as examples of the

gloominess brought on by religion. Sometimes misfortune is sent as a “veiled angel” to such, and the feeble branch is pruned in order that it may bring forth abundance of fruit.

## Chapter 12

### Temptation

As Rebekah was engaged with her reading, she was startled by a sudden crash at the window. A handful of stones had been flung against the glass with no feeble hand. Several panes of the lattice were smashed. A beautiful flower which had stood on the sill was knocked over, and the floor was strewn with fragments of broken glass, crockery, and mold.

Rebekah was not only startled but alarmed. The mischief done could not possibly be the result of accident. It must be a deliberate expression of the malice of which she and her husband were the objects. Mrs. Holdich felt afraid either to go near the window or to open the door. And it was not until several minutes had elapsed that she summoned courage enough to try and ascertain by whom the insult had been offered.

Quiet and peaceful lay nature around. As Rebekah entered her little garden, she could hear nothing but the warble of the happy songsters in the trees, and the droning buzz of the great bee as he hovered over the flowers. Not many yards from the cottage, however, Rebekah detected on the sod the mark of a large nailed boot, which she knew well did not belong either to her husband or her son. It was then no child that had done the wanton mischief. It might be but the first of a series that must destroy her peace and might even endanger her safety.

With a gloomy feeling of apprehension, Mrs. Holdich returned to her cottage, carefully shutting and then bolting the door—a precaution which she had never before taken in the daytime. She slowly, one by one, raised the broken pieces from the floor, constantly pausing to listen, and glancing uneasily up at the lattice.

“Life will be intolerable here,” thought Rebekah, “if I am constantly to be exposed to annoyances such as this. Who knows what more terrible shape the hatred of these wicked beings may take! I shall be wretched if Robert be ever later than usual in returning home, especially when the days shorten, and he must come back after dark. Would that we had never seen Castle Lestrange! And now we cannot leave it. Poverty ties us to it as to a stake, to be baited by malice, hatred, and slander, from which we have no power to escape.”

Rebekah felt her trial the more bitter, because she had been a prime cause of bringing her family into it. Holdich had been doubting between taking his present situation and that of manager of the estate of a retired Liverpool merchant, when Rebekah had thrown all the weight of her influence into the baronet’s scale. Castle Lestrange, the old romantic residence of a noble family, had attractions for her imaginations which Bothan House could never possess. Advantages and disadvantages being nearly equally divided, Holdich had allowed his wife’s wishes to turn the scale of his decision.

Bitterly now did the steward’s wife regret the part which she had taken. She suffered from actual personal fear. A timid sensitive woman might be pardoned, if in a lonely cottage, with not a friend within call, and the knowledge that enemies were near, she should give way to

emotions of dread. Painfully her thoughts vibrated between the sorrows of her aged father and the perils which threatened her husband. The loss of hard-earned savings was also no light cause of regret. "Had Holdich gold," thought Rebekah, "he could quit at once his odious position for one in which his integrity would render him honored instead of disliked. Had he gold, he could relieve my dear father from the burden of debt and the dread of a prison. Is it wrong fervently to wish for, ardently to pray for money, not for its own sake, but as a means of getting rid of perplexing cares?"

With her book on her knee, Rebekah was thus pondering upon her troubles when she heard a heavy step without, and then a rap at the door. In her nervous state she felt afraid to open it before ascertaining who her visitor might be. The rap was repeated and then a voice which was strange to Rebekah inquired whether Mr. Holdich were within.

Rebekah drew back the bolt and opened the door and saw a person with whose appearance she was quite unacquainted. He was short in stature, of middle age, and so well-dressed that at the first glance Mrs. Holdich took him for a gentleman, though the second glance altered that impression. Of one thing, however, she was certain—those neat patent-leather boots had never left the hobnail mark on the sod.

"Is Mr. Holdich within?" repeated the stranger.

"My husband, Mr. Holdich, is at church."

"That's unlucky," said the visitor, walking in without invitation, taking off his hat and wiping his forehead with a red silk handkerchief. "I have come all the way from Portly to see him, and I go back to London by rail tomorrow. I've a little bit of business to transact. He'll know my name—it is Donkin," and putting down a card on which "Donkin and Co., Wood Merchants, Milbank," was engraved, the stranger unceremoniously seated himself on a chair.

"My husband never does business on Sundays," said Rebekah.

"Quite right—good rule—never do it myself," said Mr. Donkin, engaged apparently in a survey of his own neat boots, "but you see, I want to arrange with him as to the purchase of all the timber lately cut on the estate, and that on the hill which is to be scraped for the railway. Sir Digby wishes to dispose of it, I hear, and as I've been accustomed to deal here for years, I thought I'd just drop in and settle matters. Sir Digby always does this kind of business through his steward."

"I do not know—I have heard nothing about it," said Rebekah.

"Ah, you and your husband are new to the place. I can't wait till he comes back from church," said the merchant, pulling out his heavy gold watch, "but you can give him a message from me, and I'll look for his answer before ten tomorrow. Tell him that I, Mr. Donkin of Milbank, am willing to give four hundred pounds, ready cash, for the timber which he and I surveyed lately together."

"I think that I heard my husband say," observed Rebekah, with a little hesitation, "that the timber was worth double that sum."

Donkin gave a little short laugh. "Quite a mistake, quite a mistake, my good friend. You must take into account the flatness of the market and the cost of the transit which falls on our firm. Besides,"—Donkin appeared to be examining his boots more attentively than ever—"we

always, you know—it is our practice to make an acknowledgment of ten per cent on the price agreed on to the person through whom the transaction is made. Ten per cent upon four hundred pounds, that's forty pounds down on the nail, that must be taken into consideration."

Rebekah's heart fluttered. Could it be possible that so large a sum was actually offered to her husband at the time of his utmost need, and that he could accept it without violating those principles which had been his guide through life? There was a strong doubt in her mind as regarded the latter part of the question, and it was with nervous hesitation that she said, "I do not think that Mr. Holdich is accustomed to receive such presents, or would hold it right to take them."

Mr. Donkin gave a smile, which seemed to express, "You are simple, you know very little of life." "It is our regular system," he said, "we have always pursued it in buying timber off this estate, and we have dealt here for the last ten years. It is all in the way of business. You will give my message to Holdich," he added, rising and putting on his hat. "I shall expect his answer before ten, as the train starts at 10:25. I put up at the 'George' tonight. Remember, four hundred pounds ready cash, and ten per cent on the entire sum as an acknowledgment to himself."

The visitor departed, and Rebekah remained behind trembling between hope and fear, and longing for the return of her husband. Mr. Donkin seemed such a respectable man, he could not wish to draw Robert into anything wrong or low. If to give such "acknowledgments" was the regular custom, why should an exception be made in his case? Surely what was freely offered might be accepted without blame!

And then the money was so sorely needed, and would be so generously spent! Did it not come in answer to prayer? Was it not the provision sent as a reward for Robert's unshrinking faith? Rebekah was so full of the merchant's visit that even the broken window became a subject of smaller interest, and the sight of it but served to intensify her longing to be soon released from a situation which exposed her to annoyance and insult. Rebekah almost forgot to prepare the family meal, her thoughts were so much engrossed by the offer.

"Why, mother, what on earth can have happened? The cottage looks as if some mad bull had been dashing his horns at our lattice!" such was the first exclamation of Ned when he entered his home.

"Who has done this?" asked Holdich, sternly, looking at the traces of recent mischief.

Rebekah gave an account of the shower of stones that had startled her while she was reading. Ned burst out into indignant exclamations. His father muttered, "Cowardly, unmanly!" Both went out directly to examine the footprint which had been the only clue to the offender. But some one had been before them—the mark had been effaced by some flat instrument like a spade.

"Father, you will sift this matter to the bottom—you'll find out the villain!" exclaimed Ned.

"I shall try, and yet," said Holdich, thoughtfully, "I doubt much whether it be possible to discover which of the many who owe me ill-will has dared to show it in this cowardly manner."

The outrage, the means of preventing its repetition, guesses as to the probable perpetrator, formed the chief topic of conversation during dinner time, Ned taking by far the

largest share in the talking. Holdich was more annoyed than he chose to show. For though utterly fearless as regarded himself, he was sensitive as regarded his wife.

Rebekah intuitively avoided saying anything of the visit of Donkin in the presence of her son, and was glad when the meal was over, and Ned quitted the cottage. The boy was eager to find out his oracle, Parker, and consult him on the subject of the window-breaking, but he did not mention his intention to his parents, not being certain of their approval. Parker was gaining that influence over Ned which a man good-natured, merry, and amusing, active in sports, and ready for fun, easily acquires over the young.

As soon as Ned was out of hearing, Rebekah rose, closed the door, and then seating herself by her husband, repeated to him almost word for word her conversation with Donkin. She made no comment till she came to an end, Holdich listening in silence, and then said, glancing timidly at her husband, "I do not know what you will say to it, Robert, but if it be usual and right to accept such a present, it seems as if it were a blessing sent to us from God." As Holdich did not instantly answer, his wife found courage to add, "I scarcely think that it can be wrong to do what everyone does."

"No?" said Holdich, in a tone of inquiry, "There was no harm, then, in worshipping the golden image with the rest of the world!"

"This is different—"

"My dear wife," said the steward, "Satan is ready enough to persuade us that black is white, and wrong is right, when self-interest makes us willing to be so persuaded. The money is a present, you say, but from whose pocket does it come? To take it would be to rob my master."

Rebekah flushed at the words. It seemed to her that she had been acting the part of Eve in tempting her husband. "What will you do then, Robert?" she asked.

"I shall let Mr. Donkin know that eight hundred pounds is the fair and just price for the timber. For that sum he may have it, but not for less. If he does not accept the terms there are others who will."

"You look after Sir Digby's interests as if they were your own," said Rebekah.

"A plain duty," answered the steward.

"He is scarcely worthy—"

"His worthiness or unworthiness has nothing to do with my duty towards him," said Holdich, "I have to answer for my conduct towards an earthly master to my Master in heaven."

Holdich carried his principles into practice. Early on the following morning, he walked over to Portly, and had an interview with the timber-merchant. Donkin soon saw with what sort of a man he had now to deal, and perceived the failure of his attempt to work upon Holdich through his wife. He did not, however, finally conclude the bargain. He would consult his partner in London, he said, and return to settle the business. But not another word was uttered regarding an acknowledgment to the steward. The careless, extravagant baronet, might have four hundred pounds more to throw away in ostentatious follies, but he was not

likely ever to know that he owed it to the integrity of one whom he regarded as belonging to a lower order of beings.

What had Holdich, then, to compensate for the money which he needed and which he might have taken—that money which had been within his reach, but which he had not stooped down to touch? He had the calm sunshine of an approving conscience, which is as a smile from God. He feared to look no man in the face. He had not bartered for the yellow dust of earth, the inheritance prepared for the children of light.

## Chapter 13

### The Monarch's Fall

A very different scene was presented by the cottage of Holdich at the next lecture than upon any former occasion. The tidings that the proud baronet himself was about to grace with his presence the little week-day service had spread from mouth to mouth. And although the subject of many a gibe and jeer in the servants' hall and amongst those who worked under Slimes, they had the effect of crowding the meeting. Many came from curiosity, whom no nobler motive could have drawn. Mr. Eardley saw with surprise, as well as pleasure, the crowd which clustered round Holdich's porch, and he found Rebekah in a flutter of expectation, which showed that something unusual was to happen.

"Sir Digby will be here, sir," was the steward's reply to the clergyman's inquiring look.

The first feeling of Mr. Eardley, on hearing this, was scarcely a feeling of pleasure. He reflected on the subject of the lecture which he had to deliver. He looked on the picture which he had brought of the proudest monarch of earth groveling in dust like a beast, chased with scorn from the dwellings of men! He could have wished that the haughty baronet had chosen to attend any lecture but that whose moral might appear to him to be directed against himself. But Henry Eardley repressed the feeling as one altogether unworthy of a minister of the Gospel. Had he not been intrusted with God's message for the high as well as the low? Should he shrink from speaking the truth where the knowledge of truth was especially needed?

Mr. Eardley doubted whether it were right even to wait for Sir Digby, when the hand of the large, round clock, which was as punctual as its owner, pointed to the hour of three. He was relieved from the doubt, however, by a stir amongst the crowd round the porch. All eyes were turned in one direction and then the men bared their heads, and the women curtsied low, as with lofty mien and measured stride Sir Digby passed through the obsequious throng, leading his little girl by the hand. As soon as he had entered the room prepared for the lecture, both that and the parlor were filled to overflowing. Some of the men were obliged to stand, as the abode of the steward did not offer accommodation for all.

### Lecture 4

Once again the Almighty deigned to send to the heathen monarch, Nebuchadnezzar, a warning in a dream of events that were yet to come. So deep an impression was made on

the king, that a strange dread came over his mind. In the midst of his splendors, he was troubled. He believed the vision to be, as it was, a solemn revelation from above.

This time Nebuchadnezzar's memory did not fail him. When he repeated to the Chaldeans and soothsayers the dream which disturbed his spirit, the image of what he had seen was distinct before his mind. If, perchance, a glimpse of some of the meaning of the dream flashed before any of the sages, no tongue was bold enough to utter what it might offend the tyrant to hear. Nor did any Chaldean dare to give a false interpretation, all drooping and abashed were forced to confess that the mystery could not be solved by them.

Last of all, Daniel, the Jewish exile, appeared before the ruler of Babylon. "O Belteshazzar," exclaimed the king, calling Daniel by an Assyrian name which he himself had bestowed, "because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof.

"Thus were the visions of my head in my bed. I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth. The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all. The beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.

"I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from heaven. He cried aloud and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves and scatter his fruit. Let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches. Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field, and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from man's and let a beast's heart be given unto him, and let seven times pass over him. This matter is by decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones. To the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."

When Daniel had heard the dream he was astonished and distressed. For a whole hour he remained in silence. We can readily imagine the inward struggle in his breast whilst that silence lasted. In that splendid tree he saw a picture of Nebuchadnezzar, the magnificent monarch before him, in all his pride of dominion. In the stump left with its roots in the earth, bound with iron and brass, he saw an emblem of the same king, mad, miserable, and degraded, driven to herd with the beasts, lower than the poorest wretch who crouched for alms at the gate of his palace. How could Daniel dare to give such an interpretation of the dream to the pride-swollen monarch before him?

That we may fully realize the difficulty, fully understand the greatness of the change which was to pass on Nebuchadnezzar. Let us pause for a moment to consider what history tells us of the power and greatness of him who was to be brought so low. From the height of his dignity alone can we measure the depth of his fall.

Nebuchadnezzar was not only a great ruler, but a mighty conqueror. In union with Cyaxares, king of Media, he had taken Nineveh, that great city, which between two and three

hundred years before had repented at the preaching of Jonah. He held beneath his victorious sway, conquests from all the then known quarters of the globe. Fertile Egypt, Syria, Phoenicia, Arabia, even part of distant Spain, are said to have bowed beneath the scepter of Nebuchadnezzar. And Assyria's king not only reigned, but he reigned with absolute sway. A frown from him could hurl princes to destruction, or give a city to the flames. And if it be true, as some have believed, that the golden image set up by the king was a representation of himself, what an idea does it give of the fearful height to which the tyrant's pride must have risen. He had been admired, flattered, adored, till Nebuchadnezzar had begun to think himself more than man.

Little can we marvel if Daniel shrunk from revealing to such a man the fearful judgment before him. Little can we marvel if his hand should tremble in drawing back the curtain from the terrible secret of the future. But Daniel had a plain though painful duty to fulfil. If self-denial, wisdom, and faith dwell in the hearts and illumine the minds of the children of light, truth must breathe in their words. *The lip of truth shall be established forever.* No fear of man must make the servant of God stoop even to an evasion.

Nebuchadnezzar seems to have read perplexity and distress in the face of Daniel, for he said, as if to encourage the prophet, "Let not the dream nor the interpretation thereof trouble thee."

"My lord," exclaimed Daniel, "the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies!" and then with mingled courage and delicacy of feeling, the prophet delivered his terrible message.

"The tree that you saw, which grew and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth, whose leaves were fair and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation—it is you, O king, that are grown and become strong, for your greatness is grown and reaches unto heaven, and your dominion to the end of the earth.

"And whereas the king saw a watcher and a holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down and destroy it. Yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field, and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him.

"This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king. That they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever He will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots, your kingdom shall be sure unto you, after that you shall have known that the heavens do rule.

"Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of your tranquility."

We are not told how the blood rushed to the cheek and brow of the haughty monarch on hearing the words of the prophet, and how anger, pride, wonder, alarm wrestled together in his breast. We are not told whether Nebuchadnezzar believed the awful warning, or whether he uttered a single word in reply to Daniel. We can imagine him sternly, with a wave of his hand, dismissing the Jew from his presence, considering his honor pledged not to punish, though his pride would not stoop to obey. Whatever misgivings or gloomy forebodings Nebuchadnezzar may have had at the time, they appear ere long to have quite passed away.

Days—weeks flowed on—then months. Still obsequious courtiers crowded around their monarch, hung on his words, lived on his smiles, repaid his slightest notice with the grossest adulation. Nebuchadnezzar saw no sign that his dreadful dream would ever come true, and probably tried by business or pleasure to drive it entirely from his thoughts.

Apparently as full of pride as ever, twelve months after receiving the warning, the king walked in, or as the marginal reading gives it, *upon*, his palace, whose high flat roof would command a glorious view of the city. Nebuchadnezzar gazed forth on its countless houses in their setting of verdant groves. Its hanging gardens, its lofty tower that seemed to lift itself to the clouds, the hum of busy multitudes would rise to the monarch's ear. All that earth could offer of grandeur, beauty, pomp, lay stretched below his feet—and it was he who was lord of all on which his proud eye rested.

“Is not this great Babylon,” exclaimed the exulting king, “that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?”

Even while the word was in his mouth, there came a voice from heaven, “O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken—your kingdom is departed from you!”

Before an hour had elapsed, the fearful judgment descended. Who is that wild, howling maniac who rushes through the palace which he so lately trod with pride? Who is he whom the lowest menial drives from him as he would a fierce beast broken loose? Who is he who is not suffered even to abide in the dwellings of men, but who must go forth in his lonely madness? No roof covers the head which once was encircled with a crown. In wild shaggy masses the hair hangs around it, half concealing the restless gaze of the frenzied eyes beneath. He whose table was heaped with luxuries, now tears up the grass for food! Scorched by the fiery sun in the day, wet by the heavy dews in the night, to how fearful a depth of degradation and shame is fallen the greatest of men!

Nebuchadnezzar is not the only monarch of whom we read in the Scripture as smitten for intolerable pride. In some aspects his history forms a counterpart to that of Pharaoh. Both were mighty and of lofty spirit. Both persecuted the people of God. If one threw martyrs into the furnace, the other murdered infants in the Nile. Both were warned by a holy prophet, and dread judgments descended on both. But here the resemblance stops.

In Pharaoh, we behold a man whom no chastisement could reclaim, whom no grief could effectually humble. He had trembled at the awful thunder from heaven, and started as the fierce fire ran along the ground. He had seen clouds of locusts darken the sky, had beheld a river running blood, he had swelled the wail of a nation when his firstborn was smitten with death. Yet Pharaoh never truly repented. His heart like the hardened rock returned sparks of fire for the blows that struck it. He died as he had lived, in open rebellion against God.

But the case was otherwise with Nebuchadnezzar. We have no reason to suppose that though sorely chastened he was cast off forever, rather may we hope that he was one whose sins, though many, were forgiven. Mercy watched over the poor maniac, and preserved his life for happier days. Mercy guarded for him his kingdom, so that as soon as reason returned, power and greatness were also restored.

Nebuchadnezzar was permitted to mount the throne of Assyria once more, we believe a happier and a wiser, because a more humble man. The king's besetting vice had been pride. How ready he was to sacrifice to God even this, his bosom sin, is shown by the striking fact of his proclaiming "to all people, nations, and languages," the shameful punishment which a proud man would have been most intensely desirous to hide! Nebuchadnezzar was so eager to give glory to God, that he was the recorder of his own shame. It was he who bade the world know that he had crouched with the beasts of the field. "I thought it good," wrote the contrite monarch, "to show the signs and wonders that the great God hath wrought towards me. How great are His signs, and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation."

This is not the language of pride or rebellion. The loftiness of man was bowed down and the haughtiness of man was made low, and the Lord alone was exalted. Nebuchadnezzar had not suffered in vain. How simple and affecting is his account of the blessed hour when his heavy cloud of affliction departed, not without leaving a blessing behind!

"And at the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up my eyes unto heaven, and my understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that liveth forever." The first words uttered by the late maniac's lips were those of thanksgiving and praise. The first glance of the eyes, no more rolling in frenzy, were directed upwards to heaven.

They that humble themselves shall be exalted. Is it a light honor to Nebuchadnezzar that he alone of all Gentile monarchs should be permitted to write a chapter in the Holy Scriptures of truth? Where millions of Christians, age after age, have found comfort, warning, and instruction from the writings of David, Isaiah, and the apostles, there till the end of time will they also find them in the words of Nebuchadnezzar. Not one stone rests upon another of the lofty tower of Belus. Babylon itself is no more, but the Word of God abides forever, and in that Word is embalmed the noble proclamation of Assyria's king.

It is a grand thought that amongst the ransomed children of light the once persecuting tyrant may be numbered, blessing God to all eternity for seven years of misery and madness, and repeating in glory the words which he penned upon earth, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase."

Full of instruction for ourselves is the history of Nebuchadnezzar. If ever there appeared to be a man lifted up beyond reach of misfortune, want, or shame, that man was the king of Assyria. But in his pride lay his peril, in his grandeur his snare. *With the lowly is wisdom. By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honor, and life.* The same God who cast down Nebuchadnezzar from the height of his glory and pride, is He who hath declared in the

Gospel, *Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

It is as little children that we must seek the kingdom of heaven, if we would enter therein. It is as poor sinners that we must come to God, if we would be received into His glory. Man's strength withers like the grass, his beauty as the flower of the field. Riches take wings and flee away, and he who has the widest possessions today, may tomorrow own nothing but a shroud. On what then shall man build his tower of pride?

Let the answer be given in the words of the apostle, words as much suited for the highest as the lowest, for the monarch as for the slave, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* In ourselves we are dust and ashes. Life, honor, riches, immortality, all we may have in Him. All we can have in Him alone!

## Chapter 14

### Conspiracy

Edith wondered when the lecture was concluded and the clergyman knelt in offering his prayer, why her father sat upright as ever, and why all the rest who were present, save Holdich and his wife, followed the baronet's example. Edith was perplexed, and scarcely knew what was right to be done, yet as by instinct the little child knelt, and covered her eyes with her tiny hands, till the solemn prayer was concluded. There seemed a chill over all the assembly, and no one was more painfully sensible of this than Mr. Eardley himself.

"Why does the good man not speak to me, as he always does," thought Edith when the service had come to an end. She hoped that her father would break the silence, but he only bowed slightly and stiffly to Mr. Eardley, and taking hold of the hand of his child, went forth from the cottage. Edith, feeble and constrained by the iron framework which she constantly wore, could scarcely, by painful efforts, keep pace with the long strides of her father.

"Papa," she ventured at length to say, "how did you like the lecture?"

"Only fit for children," said the baronet shortly.

"Do you mean for the children of light?"

Sir Digby deigned no reply to the question. Perhaps he scarcely understood it.

"I say, Ned," observed Parker to young Holdich, who, about an hour afterwards, was employed in laying some new turf on the mount of the Walhalla, "I don't take it that Sir Digby was mighty well pleased with that lecture of the parson. I never took my eyes off his face, and though of course he sat it out, he looked as stern and cold as that statue of the knight which is waiting to be hoisted up yonder. He'd think the parson was preaching at him."

"He had no reason to think that," said Ned, "Mr. Eardley didn't even know that he would attend, and that part about Nebuchadnezzar came in the regular order of the history."

"I'd have skipped it, had I been the parson," laughed Parker, "there's little chance of his ever having Sir Digby as his hearer again, nor me neither, for the matter of that, a little of that sort of thing goes a great way with me. One hour in a crowded room to listen to preaching and praying is enough to last me for a lifetime. We'll have a jolly evening at the Castle

tonight. There's Jack Paton down from London. He's as full of tricks as a monkey, and a rare hand at the conjuring line—he'd charm the very nails from your fingers, they say. And his comic songs—oh, they kill you with laughing! By-the-by, Valance told me to ask you if you'd like to come and meet him?"

"I should like it of all things, but—"

"*But*," repeated Parker mockingly, "when the horse is at speed you always pull him up sharp with a *but*. I'd like a jolly lark, say you, *but* my governor he thinks it naughty. I've a mind to wet my whistle with a drop of champagne, *but* I can't set my mammy a-piping."

Ned was weak enough to color and laugh.

"Now you come, I don't say you need stay, but when you're asked, you can't be downright uncivil. Your father makes enemies enough without your stepping out of your way to hunt up some more."

"Until we find out who broke our window on Sunday," said Ned, "I don't care to go where I may be in company with the fellow who frightened my mother."

"Jack would help you to catch the fox," cried Parker, "I'd bet any money he would. You should hear him tell the story how he found out the rogue who lamed the horse he was a-going to ride. 'Twas the cleverest dodge as ever I heard in my life."

"If I thought that he could help me to find out that—"

"Just you come and ask him yourself. He's the most good-natured dog in the world, and the shrewdest as ever I met with."

Ned hesitated, inclination was strong, and Rebekah did not make her home so cheerful that a little change should not present a temptation to a lively boy, such as Ned. Parker saw his advantage and pushed it.

"You know there'll be guests at the Castle this evening," said he, "when the gents are sitting over their wine, then we drop in for supper. Nothing to complain of, I can tell you, either in the company or the fare. I'll do Mousier Lemoine the justice to say he knows how to cover a table, and Valance is not stingy with the wine. You'll look in—I know that you will. Nobody will miss you at home, and if they do, it's no great matter. Your good parents will have enough to do in talking over the parson's lecture."

Ned had his father's prohibition too clear in his mind to allow him to say "yes," but he was too eager for amusement to have the courage to say "no." So the matter was left undecided.

"'Twould be a shame for me to worry my mother when her heart is so sore about my grandfather," reflected Ned, as he slowly walked homewards in the evening, after his day's work was done. "I never look at her but I see the tears in her eyes, and she's getting so low and nervous. There's one thing clear, this place don't suit her. I wish that she liked it as well as I do, but she's taken it into her head that we are not safe, and that I'm sure to be getting into mischief. I suppose that the fright about the stones, and the bad news from Kent, and the loss of the money, have upset her. But all this worry and care makes home a precious dull place for me!"

On this occasion Ned found his home not only a dull but a damp place. Rebekah, who as usual had been behindhand with her household occupations, was employing the evening in

ironing all the linen of the family, an employment which would better have suited the hours when she had the cottage to herself. Shirts and socks encumbered each chair, the ironing-blanket covered the table, over which bent the melancholy face of Rebekah, as she languidly passed the heavy iron over the steaming linen.

“Why, mother, you’re not ironing now!” exclaimed Ned with a look of disgust.

“I was put back by the lecture,” said Mrs. Holdich, who could hardly, however, have expected that anyone would be satisfied with so lame an excuse.

“And where’s father?” inquired the boy.

“One of the children of a cottager hard by has been taken suddenly ill,” said Rebekah, “your kind father has walked off all the way to Axe for a doctor.”

“He thought himself well out of the steam here, I daresay,” observed Ned, who, tired as he was with a long day’s work, felt annoyed at the heat, damp, and comfortless state of the room. “I see you don’t want me, mother, and I’ve something to do elsewhere.” So saying, Ned turned on his heel, and sauntered out of the cottage, whistling a lively air.

“Mother can’t expect me to stop in a place where there’s not so much as a chair to sit down on,” thought Ned, “somehow or other things are never comfortable at home, at least when father is away. I see no great harm in just looking in at the Castle. I’m not going to stay to supper (though I’ve not quite such strict notions as father about its being dishonest in servants to have a guest or two in the hall), but I want to see this jockey and hear his stories of the races. And if I manage to get a clue as to who was the rascal who threw those stones, I shall—while amusing myself—be doing a good evening’s work for my parents.”

So quieting conscience with the idea that he would only go to the brink of disobedience, and that he would go for a good purpose, Ned sauntered towards the door which opened into the back yard of the Castle. He would scarcely have walked so quietly into the net spread to catch him, could he have heard the conversation going on at that moment in the butler’s pantry, between Valance, Parker, Ford the head gardener, and the little jockey from London.

“I hate him like poison,” muttered Ford, a tall powerful man, who would have been deemed good-looking, but for the sinister expression in his eyes, which was not improved by a cast. “There’s been no peace since he came here as steward! He’s everywhere and at every hour, wherever and whenever he is least wanted.”

The gardener had a very disagreeable recollection of Holdich having come suddenly upon him when he was in the very act of dispatching large hampers of vegetables to London. He had a strong conviction that one property could not long hold them both.

“Could you not try the effect of a good ducking in a horse-pond? I’ve known a little of the cold-water-cure work wonders!” suggested Jack Paton, a little sharp-featured jockey, with the height of a boy, but the wizened wind-dried skin of an old man, who bore the same proportion to the tall gardener as a weasel might to a wolf-dog.

Ford and the butler glanced at each other, and Parker shrugged his shoulders.

“He’s a badger as will bite,” said the gardener, who regarded the proposal as the mouse in the fable did that of belling the cat.

"I guess he's no babe to handle," chimed in the burly butler, "he's a strong man, and a bold man, and if it came to a struggle, he'd give as good as he got."

"But there are other ways and means," laughed the jockey, amused at the evident respect in which Holdich's physical powers were held. "There are some vicious beasts, d'ye see, as can be only held in with a golden bit."

"No use in trying that on him," growled Ford, "with his idiotical notions he cares no more for money than mud! He's not like one of your racers, that will flinch from the whip, or start at the spur, or be turned by a tug at the rein. You might as well try to put saddle and bridle on a steam-engine. You can't coax him, you can't frighten him, you can't stop him! On he goes as straight as a dart, no matter what lies in his way."

"He's flesh and blood though, not iron and brass," said the jockey, "it's hard if you can't find out a raw where the lash will sting. You said he'd a wife—"

"Nothing's to be done there," interrupted the gardener. "I did but give the woman a fright by flinging a few pebbles at her window, and I soon found out that cock wouldn't fight. It came to Sir Digby's ears, and his blood is up any day at an insult to a woman under his protection. It was a lucky thing for me that even Holdich did not manage to get on the right scent."

"Ay, we've not heard the end of them stones yet," observed Parker.

"We can't meddle with the woman," pursued Ford, "she's high in favour with the little miss, I hear. The only thing that can be done is to fret and worry and tease her, and we can leave that part of the business to honest Bateman—she has a special talent in that line."

"There's a boy though," suggested Valance.

"What! the bear has a cub?" cried the jockey.

"Ay, a light-hearted chap," said Parker, "who strains a bit at his tether."

"Wild—up to a spree?" asked Jack with a wink.

"Not exactly, but gay and thoughtless, likes a song better than a sermon."

"There's the point, there's where we can gall!" exclaimed the jockey, clapping the fingers of his right hand on the palm of his left. "This Holdich—if he's the fellow you describe—will be tender here if he's nowhere else. The old bear's hide may be tough, but he'll growl if you touch the cub. We must get hold of the boy."

"You must not harm him," began Parker.

"Harm him!" exclaimed the jockey, "I'll not lay the weight of my little finger upon him! But if we can draw him into some mire that will stick, if we can get him to do what will bring him into disgrace—"

"I see—I see," cried Ford eagerly, "we'll get him to gamble and drink!"

"More than that," said Jack with a wink, "after all, mud will wash off, and the old uns will be sending him away if they find the ground slippery here. But the law, it has traps with iron teeth that will hold as well as catch, and that leave a scar ahind them. If we could coax him into one of them!"

“Impossible,” said Parker decidedly, “the cub so takes after his father that you could not get him into such a trap if you bated it with bags of gold! He flared up even at the notion of making free with the pheasants’ eggs, and had queer ideas about poaching.”

“Let me alone to manage,” said the jockey, the expression of cunning on his wizened features making them yet more repulsive, “you want to get rid of this steward, he sticks to the saddle and you can’t throw him off, plunging and kicking won’t do it. But if he sees his son in a bog, floundering in vain to get out, he’ll dismount of his own accord, and leave you to take the bit in your teeth, and range the course as you will.”

“I’ve asked the boy here tonight,” said Valance, “but fifty to one he don’t come—”

“I’ll take the odds,” cried the jockey.

“Here he is—shhhh!” exclaimed Parker, and with a dexterity which amused his companions, Jack instantly plunged into the very middle of a sporting anecdote, “so the gray horse, you see, being dead beat—” being all that Ned Holdich heard as he entered the passage.

Ned was flattered by the cordial reception which he received, and soon forgot his intention of merely looking in at the hall. The supper table, gaily lighted and loaded with such dainties as had never before met the eyes of the steward’s son, was not without its attractions. Still greater were those presented by the mirth and jesting, the songs and stories which went on around it. If Ned did think that the women servants looked bold and laughed too loud, and that some of the jokes were coarse, he was not of an age or character to pass a severe judgment upon what afforded him amusement. Jack Paton took care that the boy’s glass should never long remain empty, watching, as the jockey said to himself, an opportunity of tripping him up.

## Chapter 15

### A Crisis

“That’s a base falsehood if ever there was one!” exclaimed Ned, striking the table with his clenched fist, until all the glasses on it rang. “My father use his religion as a stepping-stone to favor! He is much more likely to find it a stumbling-block in his way! How little you know of the matter!”

“And how thankful we should be to have your wisdom to help our ignorance!” jeered the jockey, “you’re such a good un to judge, you are! You’ve seen such a deal of life and can tell half a mile off by the chink whether a bit of money is true gold or false!”

“No man ever doubted my father!” exclaimed Ned, whose face was much redder than usual, and who, though his voice was raised, did not speak with his usual distinctness.

“Doubt—no—not a doubt he knows how to get a good place, and keep it. He’s a shrewd un, there ne’er was a doubt about that. He can tell on which side his bread’s buttered!”

It was evident that Paton had changed his tactics. His object seemed to be to irritate the lad, who had taken more wine than his head could well carry, into some breach of the peace. He began to bait him with jeers and jests, especially aimed at his father, and every time that

Ned winced under some hit, or uttered a passionate retort, a peal of laughter burst from the circle who looked on at the sparring, as they might have done at a fight in a cock-pit.

Ned was aware that he was in no condition to answer, scarcely to understand what was said. The lights seemed to dance before him, nothing was steady, and the laughter and jests had a strange, ringing sound in his ears. There was a consciousness that he was where he ought not to be, and just enough sense of duty remained to make him rise from his seat with intent to quit the table and the room.

“Not going yet, lad!” shouted Parker, “we have not had our song!”

“A song!—a song!” echoed the voices around, and there was a shouting and hammering on the table, that had somewhat the effect on the bewildered boy that yells have upon a dog when pursued.

“You can’t go yet—you shan’t go yet!” cried Ford, starting up to bar Ned’s retreat to the door.

There was enough of his father’s spirit in the lad to make his courage rise at any attempt at coercion. With more resolution than he had shown all the evening, albeit with a step less steady than usual, clenching his fist and setting his teeth, Ned attempted to push past Ford, who stood in the way.

“Let him pass, Ford, let him pass. He has had too much of it already!” cried out Marion from her place at the table. Some remains of better feeling making her at the moment take part with the hunted boy.

Ford drew back and as Ned rushed out, said with a grim smile to his companions, “I’ve locked the door that leads out into the yard, and here’s the key in my pocket. He can’t leave the Castle but by the grand entrance. If he goes by the portico and shows himself off in front of the dining room windows, he’ll get into a precious row with Sir Digby!”

“I’ll follow and see where he goes,” cried the jockey.

Ned soon found that the back door by which he had entered was locked. He turned back after an ineffectual attempt to open it. He was resolved in some way to get out of the Castle, where he felt himself like a prisoner. Even had the boy possessed his full measure of intelligence, and had the assistance of daylight, the numerous turns in the passages of the large straggling building would have perplexed him. Now he felt so utterly confused that he had a vague idea that he was in a labyrinth without a clue to guide him.

Presently, however, a gust of fresh night air coming through a door which was slightly ajar, suggested the idea of a window. Ned pushed the door open and entered the room, dark save from the dim light of the rising moon, which was struggling through masses of heavy clouds which ever and anon concealed her from view.

The night had set in wet and stormy. The wind blew inwards the muslin curtains and rattled the papers which, with many other things, were loosely scattered on the table. Ned pressed on instinctively towards the window, anxious only for escape. He threw over a chair which stood in his way, but did not stoop to raise it. He felt too giddy to do so. The room was on the ground floor, and like the servants’ hall, looked out upon the yard.

Ned widened the opening of the window and climbed out. It was easy enough to do so. There was one obstacle to his further progress, however, upon which he had never reckoned. Scarcely had the lad moved three yards from the window when there was a sudden rattle of a chain, a growl, a spring, and Ned was struggling and shouting for help in the hold of a large and savage watch-dog that guarded the yard!

In the meantime, Rebekah had finished her occupation and sat down, as twilight deepened into night, watching for the return of her husband and son. "I see you don't want me mother!" were words which painfully rested on her mind. In the stillness and the darkness Rebekah was not disposed to repeat to herself any of those weak excuses which she had been too apt to bring forward to others. Simple, bare truths rose before her.

She knew that she was in trouble. She knew that trouble comes not without the permission of God, and she knew that God only suffers it to afflict His people for some purpose of love and wisdom. Even a Nebuchadnezzar was not chastened in vain! Rebekah sat by the open door, looking into the darkness. She leaned her aching head on her hand, and reflected sadly and long.

What was the voice of the rod to her—what lesson was it intended to enforce? She was no vain hypocrite, conscience acquitted her of that. She, from her youth up, had sought to keep the commandments. She had read and valued her Bible. She, in the world, was yet not of the world. She could realize her position as one of the exiles of Babylon. She felt the burden and the chain.

But this was not enough. Rebekah had learned that the exiles in Babylon are also the children of light. Again she asked her conscience, what title had she to the name? Did her light indeed shine before men? In her life did she glorify God? Rather were not her infirmities, her weakness, indolence, self-indulgence, darkening the path of others. She had the lamp of Christian profession—she had the oil of grace within, but it was as if dust had gathered on the glass, and dimmed all the luster of its light.

Rebekah had often thus accused herself, and her habitual yielding to self-indulgence, and then reproaching herself for yielding, had more than any outward trial conduced to form a melancholy temper. The error had been a failure in *looking unto Jesus* in the small as well as the great things of life, a failure in obeying His voice in what had seemed to her trivial, and this had marred her usefulness, and destroyed both domestic and spiritual comfort.

Rebekah's eyes had been bent upon the ground, even while she stood in the narrow path. She had watched the shadows, she had counted the thorns, and so mistrust had palsied her spirit, and instead of *pressing on to the mark*, she had been tempted to sit down by the wayside and weep! What if from henceforth she should arise and endeavor in the strength of her Lord to walk more worthy of her calling? What if she should seek happiness in denying self, forgetting self, and making it in all things her first aim to glorify Him who had redeemed her?

Rebekah knew her own weakness of purpose, she dared not trust her own resolutions. She knelt down in the darkness and humbly, and *without reservation*, gave herself anew unto God. She implored for the strength which she needed. She prayed less to be delivered from

her trials than to be enabled to see God's love in those trials. She asked for grace to be a better mother, daughter, and wife, and a more consistent Christian.

Rebekah's mind was much tranquillized by her prayer. She could now more trustfully look her difficulties in the face. Her father was in debt and in distress, but had not God said, *The silver and the gold is Mine*. He would not forget that His aged servant was in need of these things. Her husband was hated by those whose malice she dreaded. He might say with David, *Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked, who whet their tongues like a sword; they commune of laying snares privily*. But with David he could grasp the promise, *The wicked watcheth the righteous and seeketh to slay him; the LORD will not leave him in his hand*.

But as time sped on, and the night grew darker, and heavy drops fell like tears from the lowering clouds above, Rebekah Holdich grew more uneasy regarding her husband. Fears for Ned were lightened by the hope that he had gone out on the road to Axe to meet his father, knowing her anxiety that Holdich should not be alone after dark. Now in her solitude, Rebekah recalled all the horrible stories that she had heard of secret vengeance, and of men being waylaid when returning at night to their homes. The malicious expression on the face of Valance rose up before her like a hideous phantom. She remembered the strength of the tall bony frame of Ford, and his cause for fearing and hating the man who had discovered his frauds.

"I hope and trust that Robert took his good oak-stick with him," exclaimed Rebekah. She stirred the fire, and by its red gleam looked for the stick in its accustomed place in the corner, and a pang shot through her heart when she saw that her husband had left it behind.

"I'll light the lamp, and go to meet him, and take this with me," murmured Rebekah, with that strange belief shared even by the weakest, that those whom they love are safer as long as they are beside them. "Robert might miss his way in the dark. He hardly yet knows the place well."

Rebekah lit her lamp, put on her waterproof cloak, and took her umbrella, for she heard the sound of the pattering rain. She looked out into the dreary darkness, and felt afraid to venture forth alone, but the thought, *I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me*, came like a whisper of comfort to her soul. She stepped out on the damp gravel path, but had scarcely done so when a loud, cheerful voice, not far off exclaimed, "What, Rebekah—what takes you out at this time of the night?"

"O Robert, I am so thankful to have you safe back! I did so fear—"

"What should you fear?" asked Holdich gaily, as he stamped to clear his boots from the mud, and shook the drops from his shaggy coat before entering the cottage.

Rebekah laid down her lamp on the table, helped to take off his wet coat, hung up the glistening cap to dry, stirred the fire, and put on the kettle for tea.

"Why were you so long, dear husband?"

"I walked briskly enough," replied Holdich, "but as the doctor might not easily have found his way to the cottage, I stopped to serve as his guide, and had some time to wait. Then I wanted to know his opinion of the case, and that caused some further delay. I'm glad that the poor little fellow is better—the doctor says that the worst is over."

“You must be very much tired,” said Rebekah.

“I shall but sleep the sounder,” replied Holdich, sitting down wearily before the fire, and stretching out his hands to the kindly blaze. “Where’s Ned?” he asked abruptly.

Relieved as she was from one fear, the mind of Rebekah was suddenly turned to another. “I really don’t know,” she said anxiously, “I hoped that he had been with you.”

“I’ve seen nothing of him, and he’s not likely to be taking a walk for pleasure on a night like this. How long has he been away? Do you think that he can have gone to the Castle?”

“I have not seen him for the last two hours. He did not tell me where he was going.”

Holdich rose, and without uttering a word began putting on his wet coat again.

“Robert, where are you going?” exclaimed Rebekah.

“To the Castle, to see after my boy.” Holdich looked sternly grave as he took down his cap, put it on, and pressed it down over his brow.

“May I not go with you?” faltered Rebekah.

You—no, stay where you are. I shall be back in ten minutes,” And the steward strode across the threshold.

“You will take the lamp—”

“The moon is rising, and I could find my way to the Castle blindfold,” were the husband’s departing words, as he disappeared in the darkness.

## Chapter 16

### Inward Struggles

Ten minutes, twenty, half an hour elapsed, and Holdich still returned not. Rebekah’s heart sickened with suspense, and but for his prohibition she would have followed his steps to the Castle. Her anxiety for her son was imbibed by keen self-reproach.

“What a foolish, selfish course I have pursued, in opposing the wishes of my husband in regard to our boy! Robert thought of his true happiness—I only regarded my own! I would keep my child in the midst of snares and temptations, only because my weak heart could not endure separation. This must be my first sacrifice of self-will! I must set Ned an example of cheerful submission—I must strengthen my husband’s hands. What a care and a clog have I hitherto been to my Robert! Had he not enough to bear without the perverseness of his wife? God help me to redeem the past! There is a step—it is my husband’s—no, it is too heavy and slow—but he is weary—yes—’tis he—but Ned—Ned is not with him!”

Holdich walked straight into the cottage without speaking. His lips were tightly compressed and colorless, and there was an expression of anguish on his manly features such as Rebekah had never seen there before.

“O Robert!” exclaimed the frightened mother, “something has happened to our boy!”

Holdich gloomily gazed into the fire.

“For mercy’s sake tell me what it is—illness?—an accident?” Holdich shook his head at each question.

“One word—is Ned safe?”

“He has got into a scrape,” said Holdich, briefly, seating himself before the fire, and stifling a heavy sigh.

“A serious one?—O Robert! Tell me all—anything is better than suspense!” Rebekah was kneeling beside her husband, and looking up imploringly into his face.

“You must know all,” said Holdich, every word coming forth as by an effort. He laid his hand on his wife’s, who was startled by its corpse-like coldness. “There’s an accusation trumped up against our boy. He’s in confinement—accused of—” Holdich could not finish the sentence, his lips refused to frame the word “theft.”

“Accused—our Ned!—it is some base, infamous plot against him!” exclaimed Rebekah, indignantly.

“I know it—I feel as sure of his innocence as of my own existence,” muttered the steward.

“Then God will clear all—will show the truth—He will never suffer the malice of the wicked to prevail! But tell me the whole matter, Robert, where is our child, why can you not bring him with you?”

“He is to be taken before the magistrate tomorrow?”

Rebekah looked thunderstruck at the intimation.

“What has he done?—what do they say he has done?” she gasped forth. Her clasped hands were resting on her husband’s knees, and he felt how they trembled.

“They say,” answered Robert, stirring the fire as though to drown the painful sound of his own words, “that Ned was seen clambering out of Slimes’ window—that he was seized—that a breast-pin belonging to the architect was found upon him.”

“A false, base slander!” exclaimed Rebekah. “does not Ned indignantly deny it? Did you not see him yourself?”

“I did see Ned—I insisted on seeing him. He is bewildered and confused, and can give no clear account of anything that has happened. They had evidently been making him drink.”

“Villains!” ejaculated Rebekah. “Does Sir Digby know all?” she eagerly inquired.

Holdich nodded assent.

“And will he not protect us from wrong?”

“He would fain treat the whole matter lightly, speaks of a boyish escapade, and wishes the affair to be hushed over. Slimes would not willingly consent to that, nor would I,” added Holdich, proudly, “the matter must be sifted to the bottom. My boy’s sole possession is his character. He must not begin life with a foul stain upon it!”

“But—oh, Robert!—a magistrate!” faltered Rebekah.

“It is only guilt that need fear the daylight. Convinced as I am that my son is innocent, I would not have him shrink from the most searching examination. It gives him his best chance of clearing his character in the sight of the world.”

Rebekah gave a long shivering sigh. Her heart was full—almost to bursting.

“Go to rest, Rebekah, my poor wife,” said Holdich, with feeling. “God help you to bear this new burden!”

“I could not rest—oh, let me stay here beside you!”

“No—go—I must be alone,” said the steward. Rebekah felt as if grief were only endurable when shared together, and could hardly bear to quit the room. There were so many questions to be asked, questions of interest so intense, that her whole heart seemed to be on her lips, and ignorance was anguish indeed! But her presence increased her husband’s sufferings, he desired and required solitude, and here was the first test offered to her newly-formed resolutions of childlike obedience. Strong was the temptation to offer that passive resistance to her husband’s will, by which she had so often wearied him into compliance with her own. Holdich would not by a harsh look or word drive his suffering wife from his side, but Rebekah had resolved and prayed that her husband’s wishes should be her law, and bitter as the sacrifice was, she now rose from her knees and obeyed.

With a strange sense of relief, Holdich heard the door close behind his wife—free from the constraint of her presence, he folded his arms, dropped his head on his breast, and groaned aloud! He could not have endured that any human eye should have watched that fearful mental struggle which forced the drops to lip and brow, as if wrung forth by violent bodily pain. Temptation had come suddenly to the strong man in a new and terrible form. Holdich had been accustomed to battle with the world and overcome it. He had a lofty consciousness of rectitude, and never had statesman in office a nicer sense of honor, or a more jealous care to preserve his character from the lightest breath of suspicion, than the steward of Castle Lestrangle, in his lowly but responsible post. Holdich had known poverty, had encountered opposition, difficulties he could struggle with, danger he feared not, but his soul started back from disgrace.

While Rebekah was weeping and praying in her chamber above, Holdich could neither shed tear nor utter prayer. All the depths of his nature were stirred up. Fierce passions that had long lain dormant and still, suddenly rose to battle in his breast. Anger—hatred—even revenge, started up as if from long slumber, and—darkest of all—the spirit of rebellion, that spirit that dares to question even the justice of the Almighty, hissed its suggestions into his soul. “Is it not in vain that I have kept my hands pure, that I have trampled worldly gain under foot, that I have dared to refuse to join in the worship of Mammon!”

Holdich, much as he had known of the world and its wickedness, had never seen before so much of the workings of Satan, for he beheld them now not only around—but within! Not that he doubted that *in the end* innocence would be cleared, but when he remembered how utterly unable his son had appeared to speak in his own defence, when he remembered how many witnesses had seen his exit through the window, a view of which was commanded by those of the servants’ hall, when he recalled the indisputable fact that Ned had been seized by the watch dog, and only rescued from its fangs by the menials, he could not but be aware that long—perhaps life-long disgrace might cloud the name of his boy, even if he should escape the doom of a burglar!

And where were means to be found of procuring counsel to defend him? In case of his being committed for trial, and Holdich could not shut his eyes to the probability of this, who would offer bail for his appearance? The want of money appeared to be a more serious evil than ever. Then came the bitterness of parental disappointment. Holdich felt assured that his

boy could never have stooped to theft, but he had broken his father's command. He had feasted with his father's enemies, he had indulged in that intemperance which his father had ever condemned. Ned had brought his misery upon himself and in that misery was involved that of the parents who had built upon him their dearest earthly hopes!

There are some periods in each man's life, even the life of a Christian, when he seems to be left to himself, as it is written of Hezekiah, *God left him to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart*. Such are the darkest moments in the experience of the children of light. Their sun yet shines, but the shadow of earth has hidden it from them. God's eye is upon them, but they do not feel His guiding hand. They are tossed in the tempest, and though the Savior is with them, it seems as if He slept. Even Elijah despairingly prayed for death. Even David, after long-continued proofs of God's over-ruling care, exclaimed, "I shall perish by the hand of Saul!"

Nor are these seasons without their value, for we learn in them our own weakness, our want of faith and submission. They teach us, like children too feeble to walk, to cling to the arm which is Almighty.

It was such a season with Robert Holdich, as he sat gloomily before the fire, revolving his present trial, so much heavier than any which he had hitherto been called on to sustain. Twice Rebekah, uneasy at his delay, descended the narrow stair, and timidly opened the door. Each time, as if disturbed by her entrance, Holdich motioned her away. He gazed with fixed, tearless eyes, at the glowing embers before him, seeming to watch the gradually fading away of their light, and perhaps tracing in them emblems of his own cherished hopes. His lamp burned low in the socket, flared, flickered, then expired. Holdich cared not to rise to replace the candle within it. He needed no light, gloom was more congenial to his soul. So all was dark, almost utterly dark, for the moon was shedding her watery beams on the other side of the cottage, and scarcely did their faintest reflection relieve the blackness of outer night.

Long and deadly was the struggle between faith and doubt, submission and rebellion. Hours passed unheeded by. At length, Holdich rose from his seat, not comforted—but subdued. Not encouraged to hope, but strengthened to endure. He rose with the words on his lips, *Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him*, and turning towards the window saw the first rosy tint in the deep blue sky that announced that dawn was approaching. The struggle was over, the gloom was departing. Once more Holdich could look up with an eye of faith to the God whom he served, and trust His cause, the cause of his child, to Him who judgeth righteously. He could bow his knee in prayer, and as he did so the stormy waves of passion were stilled. Earthly hopes might die away, but the day-star again was rising. The tried Christian remembered and trusted the word, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*.

## Chapter 17

### The Examination

Soft and bright dawned the morning. The freshness of the air, the fragrance of the flowers, the drops that glittered on leaf and spray, alone told of the weeping night that had preceded it. Rebekah was early down on that morning. Before the clouds had lost the bright

rose of sunrise, she had relit the fire in the grate, brought the water from the spring, and she was preparing the table for breakfast when her husband re-entered the parlor.

Holdich looked paler than usual, perhaps older, but the steward had quite regained his calm composure of manner. He had braced himself up for the trials of the day. Rebekah was tremulous and sad. Deep lines under her eyes betrayed long weeping, but in her new resolve to deny self and forget self, she made a brave effort to suppress any burst of grief that might shake the courage of her husband. Nay, she could greet him with words of trust, "Robert, we know that all things work together for good." He thanked her by a press of the hand.

Quietly passed the morning meal. Little was said. The minds of both husband and wife were full of thoughts too deep for words. Rebekah could hardly restrain her tears during the morning devotions, especially during the prayer offered up for her only son, but the calm deep voice of Robert did not falter. Faith had had a long battle, but God had given it the victory at last.

"You are going—to him?" asked Rebekah, as Holdich, after glancing for the fourth or fifth time at the clock, took down his cap from its place.

"I shall accompany him to Axe, and please God, bring him back here today," said her husband.

"Then you do hope—you feel sure—all will go well?" faltered Rebekah.

Holdich did not answer directly. He was too truthful to deceive his wife with an assurance which he did not himself entertain. "I cannot be sure that all will be righted at once," he replied, "but I have confidence that God will at last make innocence clear as the noonday."

"But in the meantime—" Rebekah could not raise her eyes to her husband's, as she uttered the broken sentence.

"In the meantime, dear wife, he and we may have much to suffer. We shall *feel* the heat of the furnace, but if our poor boy, if we, learn thoroughly the lesson which trouble is meant to teach, if earthly bonds be burned away, we shall thank God in a better world for the sharpest trials of this."

"I must see my Ned before he goes," said Rebekah, moving towards the door. Gently but firmly Holdich laid his hand on her arm.

"Rebekah," he said, "pause a moment. Our boy has a trying ordeal before him. A visit from you would unman him. You could scarcely meet without tears."

"Oh, you would not keep asunder mother and son at such a moment!" exclaimed Rebekah, the hot drops gushing from her eyes.

"He will need firm nerves and a clear head. I wish—yet I scarcely know how to ask that you should give up seeing him till the examination is over."

Rebekah's reason told her that her husband was right, but her affections had never been much under the control of her reason. She had an almost irresistible yearning to clasp to her heart her cruelly injured son, as if her arms could shield him from wrong. But was it not her duty meekly to submit her will to that of her husband?—was it not his part to judge, and hers to obey? Conscience spoke where reason would have been silenced. Rebekah again yielded her wishes to those of Robert.

“You know best,” murmured the mother in a scarcely audible tone, “you will support and encourage our child, and tell him—oh, tell him that we never doubted him even for a moment!”

Holdich drew his wife close to his heart. “Rebekah, you act nobly,” he said, “your giving up this meeting is the greatest relief to my mind.” He had dreaded the interview, and the excitement which it would inevitably produce in his son, whose nerves were already severely shaken by the events of the night, and whose fate might depend on the clearness and accuracy with which he could recall those events.

Her husband’s few words of praise went warm to the heart of Rebekah, and soothing was the consciousness that she had again exerted self-denial, and kept the resolutions which she had prayerfully made. Her thoughts followed Holdich to the Castle, and the image of her boy was scarcely ever absent from her mind. She longed to catch a glimpse of him on his way to Axe, where he must undergo examination before the magistrate. Rebekah walked forward into the shrubbery, and strained her ear to catch the sound of wheels. She could, as she believed, see without herself being seen. The clink clank of the workmen’s hammers employed on the Walhalla painfully distressed the listening mother, drowning other sounds, and suggesting ideas of fetters. Presently the hammering ceased. Rebekah could see through the foliage the workmen moving in one direction, as if attracted by some common object of interest.

“They go to see my poor boy’s departure! How his bleeding spirit will shrink from the gaze of all those curious eyes!” thought Rebekah, as she pushed aside the branches and bent forward, in order to command a clearer view of the drive. She had not very long to wait. Rapidly a carriage drove past, but she caught a glimpse of a face at the window. There were moustaches and a pointed beard, and lank black hair parted in the middle, so familiar to all who dwelt near the Castle as belonging to the architect Slimes. There were others with him in the carriage.

Rebekah had not time to recognize them, but she saw Ford seated on the box. He had turned to look towards the steward’s cottage, and in doing so caught sight of herself. His triumphant smile of gratified malice seemed to pour the last drop of bitterness into the cup of the unhappy mother. There went the accuser of, and the witnesses against, her dear son—there went those who would leave no stone unturned to ruin her husband! Rebekah instinctively drew back, and let the branches close like a screen. She regretted the next moment that she had done so, as another conveyance followed the carriage, but the blinds were down, and those who were nearest could not look within.

The sound of wheels died away. Rebekah returned to her desolate cottage. Her spirit would have sunk within her but for the thought, *If God be for us, who can be against us?* She could not summon up courage to pay her daily visit to the Castle. Her little pupil could not expect her on the day that might decide the fate of her son. Rebekah felt that it would be impossible to face the servants and endure their taunts, or even their pity.

Her comfort was to take the Bible on her knee, and drink in the spirit of the Psalms, so many of which seemed expressive of the very grief which burdened her soul. The cruelty of the oppressor, the plots of the wicked, the blighting of earthly hopes, the Psalmist had known

them all. He had looked forward with dread to an unknown future, and yet amidst the tempest of trouble lifted up his eyes to the hills from which came his help. He had found the Lord to be a rock and a fortress. His saddest wails ended in strains of triumph. It is perhaps impossible to appreciate all the beauty of the Psalms until the soul turns to them in anguish as a mirror of its own distress, and there beholds not only the reflection of an earthly mourner, but the beam from heaven resting on its head, and forming a halo of light.

But Rebekah was not to be left to her quiet solitude. She had unguardedly left the door of the cottage open, and she was startled by the voice of Edith's old nurse, and the sight of her portly figure in the porch.

"Well, Mrs. Holdich, I'm sorry for you. 'Tis hard when one's own flesh and blood turns out a shame and a disgrace," said the woman, as she noisily entered the parlor. "But you see what comes of all this praying and preaching. It won't do, Mrs. Holdich, it won't do! Of all your scamps in this world, your psalm-singing scamp is the worst."

Rebekah forced herself to meet the gaze of those insolent eyes, and replied in as calm a voice as she could command, "I trust that today's examination will fully clear the character of my son from every charge which malice can bring against it."

"Oh, dear, yes, that's likely enough!" cried Mrs. Bateman, with the pleasure which a cat takes in playing with its victim. "Mr. Slimes' room was the most natural place in the world for a gardener's boy to get in at night, and through a window the most proper way for him to get out, and gold breast-pins will slip into pockets by chance. Only it was a pity, it was, that the innocent lamb should have forgotten that there was a big dog kept in the yard!"

"A dog!" exclaimed Rebekah, much startled.

"Oh, you've only heard half the story, I find!" cried Mrs. Bateman, with cruel delight. "Maybe your worthy husband did not tell you that old Jowler was not so sure of your son's innocence as you are, sprang at his throat, pinned him to the wall, and would have made short work of him, if his cries and shrieks had not brought the men to his help from the other side of the yard."

Rebekah trembled so violently that she had to grasp the table for support. "Was my boy injured?" she gasped forth.

"Well," said the merciless tormentor, "not very much torn, for the matter of that, but I fancy old Jowler has left his mark, and one never knows what may come of the bite of a dog. But that's not the worst part of the scrape. You see what an awkward business it is! Nigh twenty pair of eyes saw that boy a getting out of that window, for the servants' hall is right in view of it. Mr. Grange, he's the magistrate—is he, there ain't a harder man in the county, and he's special hard on housebreakers. He's sure, they say, to commit the lad for trial at the next assizes, and he's not likely neither to take bail, e'en if you'd the best securities to give. It's a bad thing for a lad, it is, to get mixed up with jailbirds in a prison, even if he's acquitted at last, he never forgets what he's seen and heard, and the world never forgets it neither. So—"

"Mrs. Bateman, I would wish to be left alone till the return of my husband and son," said Rebekah Holdich, who could no longer endure such a conversation.

"Oh, dear, nobody wants to intrude," said the nurse, bustling towards the door, "I thought it but neighborly to come and comfort you in your trouble. Stay alone, by all means, until your

husband returns," she added, standing with her hand on the latch, "but if you stay for your son, you'll have to wait maybe till he comes back from his fourteen years beyond seas."

With this parting sting, Mrs. Bateman went out, slamming the door behind her, and hurried off to report the interview, with her own additions, to such of the maids at the Castle as had not gone to Axe that morning, and to make little Edith cry bitterly by declaring that Mrs. Holdich looked so ill, she was sure this business would be the death of her.

As soon as her tormentor had departed, Rebekah sank on her chair, and buried her face in her hands. "Oh, cruel! Cruel!" she sobbed, "to pour vinegar on a bleeding wound like mine! To come to an almost broken-hearted mother, and tear away hope from her breast! I never wronged her by word or deed. Oh, there is one command in the Gospel which surely no one in my place could have power to keep—the command to love one's enemies! Let them talk of Christian forgiveness who have never known what it is to have those dearest to them hated, slandered, and ruined—who have never known what it is to be mocked, and in their hour of keenest distress! And yet who gave that command? Was it not He who was Himself persecuted even to the death. Who was not only Himself reproached and reviled, but who knew that all who loved Him on earth would be hated even for His sake. And He who gave the command, can He not also give power to keep it? How every hour shows me more of my helpless weakness! How I shrink back shudderingly from the cup which my Master drained to the dregs! Poverty, shame, persecution, the holy Savior knew them all. He was tempted in all points as we are, and He can *save to the uttermost*—without that thought I should sink! Father, husband, child, let me commit them all to His care—His love is yet greater than mine. Oh, for stronger faith, more confiding love—for that charity, gift of God, which can bear, believe, and endure!"

Wearily passed the hours, and yet, in the midst of wearing anxiety and distress, Rebekah was not altogether wretched. She felt the sustaining arm of eternal Love around her, and though she wept, it was like a child who sobs on a parent's bosom. The darkest hour of affliction is over when once we have sought in sincerity to resign our wills unto God.

As the time approached when the return of Holdich might be expected, Rebekah tried to relieve her mind from its terrible suspense by active occupation. She prepared the meal, spread the table for *three*, went to her son's little room, arranged his books, filled a small glass with flowers and placed it in his window, as if to persuade herself of the certainty of his return. Rebekah sought to forget Mrs. Bateman's cruel prognostications, but she could not drive them from her remembrance. And the horrible image of her fair-haired boy in the hold of a savage dog haunted her like a specter.

At length, the sound of wheels again caught the straining ear of the mother. No vehicle stopped at her porch. Slimes and the witnesses against Ned Holdich were returning to the Castle. Did the plotters of evil return triumphant, or had Providence exposed and defeated their plans? Rebekah yearned for an answer to that momentous question, but dared not go to the Castle to seek it. The solitude in which she was left increased the hopes of Rebekah, for had Ned been committed for trial would not one of his triumphant accusers have been certain to have carried the tidings to his mother? But the suspense was too great to be endured. Rebekah became as one parched with feverish thirst. Her mouth was dry, her pulse beat

fast, a ringing sound was in her ears. She would go forth on the path over the fields, and meet her husband—her son!

Rebekah sped on with a rapid step, which almost increased to a run when she saw at a distance two figures, yes, *two*, though too far off to be recognized even by the straining eye of affection. That sight increased hope and gave wings to speed. Panting she sped on her way, and the two quickened their pace to meet her. There was no doubt of their identity now. Holdich and her fondly loved son were returning from the examination. Truth had doubtless prevailed, and the dark cloud been dispersed forever. But Rebekah would have felt more glad assurance had Ned bounded on in advance of his father to meet her. He seemed rather to fall a little behind, and the steps of neither parent nor son were like the steps of those who triumph.

When Rebekah came near enough to distinguish the expression of their faces, her heart sank within her. Robert's bore that of manly endurance, Ned's that of sorrow and shame. The boy said nothing when his mother, on reaching him, pressed him convulsively to her bosom. Holdich answered the eager questioning of her eye with one word, spoken in a tone so low that her ear could scarcely catch it—"Committed." Down fell crashing at that word the fabric of her hopes. The examination had been unfavorable to the accused, he had been committed for trial at the next assizes.

How had Ned escaped a prison in the meantime? How had his father, himself without funds, and a stranger in this part of the country, succeeded in procuring securities to give bail for the unhappy boy's appearance at the sessions?

Such were the questions which flashed through the mind of Rebekah, but she could not give them utterance, her tongue refused to frame them. With her arm round her drooping son, and her manner even more tender than usual, Rebekah walked at her husband's side towards their home. None spoke on the subject uppermost in the minds of all. Holdich occasionally broke the oppressive silence by some commonplace question or remark, asked his wife whether she had heard that morning from her father, mentioned having met Mr. Donkin at Axe, but such attempts at conversation were fitful, and the theme was never pursued.

The meal was as silent as the walk. Although the usual hour for dinner had long been passed, no one had any appetite for the food before him. To partake of it was a task, to be got over as quickly as might be. Ned looked as if every morsel would choke him. His fair hair hung in wild strands half over his drooping face. He never once raised his eyes. His mother was almost afraid to look at him, lest her gaze should increase his distress.

After he had finished his brief meal, Holdich rose from the table, said grace, and immediately left the cottage on his usual round of duty. As soon as he had departed, Ned, whose heart was almost bursting, gave vent to the pent-up tide of emotion, and throwing himself on his mother's neck, burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"Oh, mother, mother!" he cried, "I am the most miserable wretch upon earth!"

She strove to comfort him as only a parent can comfort, spoke to him of her confidence, her love, her sure faith that God would at last make his innocence clear, that Providence would never forsake him.

“But I have deserved all, it has been my own folly that has plunged me into this sea of misery! I do not mean,” he added hastily, dashing the blinding drops from his eyes, “that I ever touched or thought of touching what was not my own—my father’s son never could have stooped to that! But my folly, my pride, my self-will made me break my father’s command, made me put myself in the way of temptation—oh, what a way of thorns have I found it!”

“This will be a warning to you, my dear son, for the future.”

“To my dying day,” exclaimed Ned. “Never, never can I forget what I had to endure this morning when I passed through that crowd, when I stood before the magistrate. Oh, mother, it seemed as if all those staring eyes around withered me with their gaze. I could not bear it. I wished that the earth would open and hide me. My father, he has been so good—not one word, not one look of reproach for all the shame I have caused him. I thought that he would be so sternly indignant, I dreaded his anger above all. But his kindness was almost harder to bear. He spoke for me. I could hardly speak a word for myself—what could I say? I could not even tell how I came to be in that room at all. I have a kind of idea that I wanted to get out of the Castle, and that was the shortest way, but all is so confused, so strange, nothing distinct but the sudden horror when I heard the growl, and the dog sprang upon me.”

Rebekah shuddered and closed her eyes.

“But my father spoke out so clearly, he who is generally so silent. And I am sure that his words had effect, there was such a stillness in the room. He spoke of ill-will and hatred, told of the shower of stones at our window, and Valance’s threat, and then turned sharp round, and faced the witnesses, and asked such questions that they seemed to cower like curs when a lion is at bay. Especially he cross-questioned Parker as to my being at the Castle at all, who had invited me, why I was invited, whether I had not been pressed to drink? Parker seemed abashed and ashamed—but ho, think of that man being in the witness-box against me! I never believed that he could be so false.”

“He has been your companion, never your friend,” said Rebekah.

“When my father had finished speaking,” continued Ned Holdich, “I think that the magistrate himself began to suspect that all had been a foul plot. And then Mr. Eardley, he came forward, and spoke for the respectability of our family (how ashamed I felt that *he* should see me in such a position), and then, to my surprise, a short gentleman did the same—I did not know even who he was, till I heard that his name was Donkin.”

“Donkin,” echoed Mrs. Holdich, “do you mean that he came forward in your favor?”

“Yes, and spoke as if he had known you and my father for years.”

“How strange—how very strange!” murmured Rebekah, “I never saw him but once, and your father, I believe, but seldom. He must have had some motive.” It was not difficult for the steward’s wife to guess what that motive must have been.

“Then the magistrate,” continued Ned, speaking with rapidity and excitement, “summed up what the witnesses had said. He did not seem sure of my guilt, I may thank my father for that, but then, he said, no one denied that I had been in the engineer’s room, that I had been seized after clambering out of it, that I had no business to be in that place, and that a gold pin, which Slimes had sworn to having left there, was found by Valance in my pocket. He

said that he had no choice but to commit me, but that he was willing to take bail for my appearance—two securities of fifty pounds each.”

“And who came forward to save my boy from a prison?” cried Rebekah, who had listened with intense interest to the hurried account of her son.

“Mr. Eardley came forward directly.”

“Blessings on him!” fervently ejaculated the mother, “but who besides him in this place of strangers was found willing to risk fifty pounds?”

“I don’t exactly know,” replied Ned, “for at that time I grew so faint and dizzy that the room seemed to swim around me. I was taken half-fainting out of court, but the last thing that I remember was Mr. Donkin going up to my father, and whispering something into his ear. I suppose that he was offering to become the other security. It was very kind in such a mere stranger.”

Rebekah could not echo the words “very kind.” She could hardly have told herself why a sensation of pain stole over her at this mention of Mr. Donkin. The arrangements about the sale of timber had not been finally concluded. What more natural than that an unprincipled man should seize the moment of the steward’s sore distress to renew, in a less offensive form, his offer of a bribe? Might not Robert have been tempted to yield a little in guarding the interests of a master who never would miss the money, in order to save his only son from the misery, the shame, the contamination of a jail? Would it be so very wrong to do so?

Rebekah started at the shadow of evil which was falling on her own soul, and felt indignant with herself for having thought for one moment that it could have rested on her husband. His had never been “eye-service.” He had been as faithful to the unworthy as to the worthy, as faithful in the least things as the greatest. Was it possible that any temptation could make him swerve, but a hair’s breadth, from the line of strict integrity?

Rebekah’s heart gave an indignant negative to the question. The question itself seemed an insult. And yet it was hard to believe that the wood-merchant would volunteer to become security for the son of a man whose unyielding honesty stood in the way of his gains. If Rebekah felt perfectly sure that Holdich had entered into no compromise, why was it that she shrank from mentioning to her husband the name of Donkin, or asking what had induced him to act the part of a friend? Was it not a secret feeling that she could endure anything rather than a discovery of the smallest deviation from strict rectitude in him whom she had regarded as the soul of honor?

## Chapter 18

### Help in Need

Very heavily did the cruel suspense of his situation weigh upon young Ned Holdich. His approaching trial at the assizes was like a sword hung over his head. The miseries of his late examination were but a foreshadowing of what he would be called upon to undergo. His imagination pictured the worst. He would be tried, condemned, and transported—sent, the companion of felons, to wear away his youth in a far distant land. His parents would be

wretched—oh, how far more wretched than if they had laid him in an early tomb! They would be worse than childless.

His would be a fate more intolerable than that which befell the proud king of old—driven from his country, hunted from men, compelled to dwell with the lowest of his kind. “For never shall I,” thought the miserable lad, “be restored to my former place. The felon’s brand will be always upon me, no one will trust me, I shall have no means even of earning my bread.”

This last trial was the more vividly presented to the mind of Ned Holdich, from the enforced idleness of his position. He could not continue to work for Sir Digby Lestrangle while standing committed for trial, still less could he quit the place to seek employment elsewhere until his fate was decided.

What would not the unhappy boy have given to have been able to recall the lost opportunity of joining his uncle! Two days, but two days before he would have been certain of a kindly welcome. *Now*, the schoolmaster could no more open his door to one committed for theft, than a shepherd admit a wolf into his fold!

Ned must drag through the long weary weeks at the home of his father, ashamed to go forth, afraid to be seen, a prisoner though not in a prison. He thought that he would never, till the day of his trial, have courage to cross that threshold, and the very kindness shown by his parents cut the poor boy to the soul. Listless he sat for hours, staring dreamily into vacancy, unable to settle his mind to any kind of occupation.

“Ned, my boy, go and dig up some of our potatoes,” said Holdich to his son on the morning following the day of his examination. Ned slowly rose from his seat.

“And after you have done that, just nail up the clematis on our porch, which has been loosened by the wind.”

There was such evident reluctance in the boy’s obedience, that his father added, laying a hand on his shoulder, “Don’t give way, Ned, to that listless gloom which would make you a burden to yourself. Remember that man was made to work.”

“I have no heart for work,” muttered Ned.

“Have a heart then for duty, my boy. Your spirits will give way and your health break down if you yield to this feeling of despair. Remember all is not lost. We have God and a just cause still.”

Ned glanced up at his father, and met a gaze so frank and fearless that it inspired his young heart with hope. His parent seemed to him as some stately pine over which the winter blast raves and howls, but which falls not, fades not—whose verdure looks only the richer with its fringe of frost and burden of snows. Animated and encouraged more by the look than the words, Ned went forth to his work. As soon as he had quitted the cottage, Holdich turned to his wife.

“Are you not expected by your pupil at the Castle?”

“Oh, Robert, I cannot go there! You know not how I shrink from the taunts, nay, the very presence of those who dwell there.”

“I know it too well,” said her husband, gravely, “but have you considered, dear wife, that you can retain no situation unless you perform its duties, and that at no time could we less

easily spare the salary which you receive? Not to mention the position of your father, I am most anxious to secure the aid of good counsel for our boy. I am at this moment pressed for money, and see nothing but difficulty and debt before us unless God send help from some unexpected quarter."

Rebekah suppressed a shivering sigh.

"If you indeed feel the effort too great," pursued Holdich, looking with anxious affection at the grief-worn face of his wife, "I do not ask, do not wish you to make it. I will at once request Sir Digby to find another teacher for his child."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Rebekah, dashing aside the tears that had risen unbidden to her eyes. "It was but a moment of foolish weakness. I will go at once, and be only thankful to be able in any way to help you." She ascended the stairs with a rapid step, and returned in a few minutes attired for her walk, and found her husband waiting below.

"I will take you as far as the Castle," he said, and Rebekah leant on that strong arm with the clinging confidence of a child. It seemed as if she could face all the world as long as her husband was beside her.

Holdich paused in his little garden to speak a few words to his son, who was stooping over his spade.

"I think that I must get you, Ned, to knock up an arbor for your mother. It would command a fine view in that corner, just under the lilac yonder. I'm glad that you brought your carpenter's tools, and know how to use them, my boy."

"I fear, Robert," said Rebekah, as they moved on, "that I am taking you out of your way."

"But a few steps," replied the steward. "I am going on to the park to superintend the removal of the timber. Donkin appointed eleven."

"Then he agreed to purchase?"

Holdich nodded his head.

Again that painful shadow crossed the mind of the wife. With an irresistible impulse she inquired, "And what were the terms agreed on?"

"Eight hundred pounds. It is the fair price."

"Oh, I'm so thankful!" involuntarily escaped from the lips of Rebekah.

Holdich stopped short in his walk. "Why?" he demanded in a little surprise, looking full in the face of his wife. She was too much confused to be able to reply, but he read her thoughts at a glance. "Rebekah, did *you* doubt me?" he said, in a gentle tone of reproach.

"Oh, Robert, forgive me, but—but I thought that he might have offered to be security for our boy only if—if—"

"You thought rightly. He did offer and you may guess on what terms," said the steward.

"And you acted as you always act!" exclaimed Rebekah with emotion. "I hate myself for doubting it for a moment, but I thought that the temptation must have been so great."

"It was a temptation," said Holdich, gravely, as he resumed his walk, "for I saw no other means of saving our child from prison. I thank God for helping me through it. My foot had well-nigh slipped."

Rebekah marveled at such a confession from a man like her husband. But without appearing to notice it, she said, "And after you had refused his terms, did the merchant still generously offer bail?"

Holdich slightly smiled, as he shook his head. "Little chance of that," he replied.

"Then how—who—"

"I almost gave up all for lost," pursued Holdich. "Poor Ned was fainting and I believe that in that state he would have to be carried to a prison. I thought of you, and what you would suffer when I returned home alone. Yet even then words of comfort were ringing in my ears, *Trust in the LORD; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.*

God sent help, as He always does, though not always in the way that we expect. A young officer was present in the court. I had never seen him before, but he was evidently well-known to Mr. Eardley. They whispered together for a few seconds, and then with a kindly frankness, which to my dying day I shall never forget, Mr. Maxwell, as he gave his name, came forward and became the second security for my son's appearance."

"It was more than we could have dared to expect," cried Rebekah.

"We do not expect enough from our heavenly Father," said Holdich, "we rest too much on our own foresight, exertions, strength. He brings us to feel that we can do nothing without Him, and then He does all for us."

"Past mercies should indeed strengthen our hope for the future," said Rebekah, "who knows whether this most bitter trial may not be followed by a blessing?"

"May not be in itself a blessing," rejoined her husband, in a low tone. "We tried to bring up our Ned in the right way, but not with perfect success. Doubtless we made mistakes. God has taken the teaching into His own hands and He can make no mistake."

Rebekah felt so much encouraged by this brief conversation that, with a courage which surprised herself, she passed alone through the hall, endured the prying gaze of several of the servants, ascended the wide staircase, traversed the gallery, and entered the bright, airy room where, propped up by cushions, sat the little heiress of Lestrange.

The countenance of Edith, when she caught sight of her teacher, might have formed a study for a physiognomist, such varied emotions were mirrored in the pale, little face. The smile of welcome instantly chased by the expression of sympathizing sorrow, hope, fear, tenderness, pity. The wistful eyes speaking what the tongue did not venture to utter. Mrs. Bateman, as usual, left the room on the entrance of the teacher, but not before muttering audibly, "Well, there's more brass in the world than one looked for. If I'd had a son agoing to be tried at the next assizes, I'd not have cared to go flaunting abroad."

"How can you!" exclaimed Marion, who happened to be standing in the passage. The expression was not due to pity alone. Marion had a strong persuasion on her mind that foul play had been used towards Ned Holdich, and her soul was not yet dead to every honorable feeling. The girl, having been a witness to the scene at the supper-table could scarcely entertain a doubt of the innocence of the steward's son. She knew that he had wished to leave the castle by the backdoor, she knew by whom that door had been locked, she knew

that the jockey had dogged his steps, and that Ned had been in that state which gives to an enemy every advantage.

Marion had not the courage to come forward and openly avow her suspicions, and so draw upon herself the hatred of which the Holdich family were victims. She dared not either give offence to Ford, or run the risk of involving him in trouble. But Marion's conscience was not at rest. The sight of the pale meek mother wrung the girl's heart with remorse. She felt like an accomplice in working the ruin of those whom she could not but respect. And more bitterly than ever she realized how deeply she had sunk in the quicksand of worldly temptation.

It was some time before Edith ventured to allude to the distress of her teacher. With intuitive delicacy the child only showed her sympathy by more clinging tenderness of manner. She fondled Rebekah's hand, pressed it close to her little bosom, and then to her feverish lips. It was evident to the teacher that the child could not bend her thoughts to her tasks. Her mind was full of something that was struggling for utterance. And at last, instead of answering some simple question, Edith said, as if thinking aloud, "I'm sure that he did not take it."

"No, he would rather have died!" cried the mother.

"Oh, I'm so glad that you say so!" exclaimed Edith, her face brightening with sudden sunshine. "I wanted so much to ask you, for I knew you would tell me the truth. But I need not have asked," she added, her pale cheek flushing as she spoke. "I need not have cared for what nursie told me, for papa was sure to be right."

"What did Sir Digby say?" asked Rebekah eagerly.

"Yesterday I was down in the drawing-room with all the visitors," said Edith, "and I sat on papa's knee while he was talking with the other gentlemen. They said a great deal about the—you know what"—Edith significantly squeezed the hand of Rebekah. "And papa said, 'Nothing shall ever make me believe that the son of Holdich is a thief. The witnesses are'—I can't remember the word, I think that it meant that they were not quite fair."

"Prejudiced?" suggested Rebekah.

"Yes, that was the word," cried Edith. "But I don't know what witnesses are."

"Those who were present," said the teacher.

Edith paused for several moments, with that reflecting expression on her delicate features that made her look prematurely old. "Those who were present," she repeated to herself, and raising her dark eyes to Rebekah's, she said, "Then the great God was a witness too."

That simple observation of a little child was as the cup of cold water to a thirsting soul. It brought vividly before the anxious mother the truth of the omniscience of Him who ordereth all things in heaven and earth. Yes, where the wicked had laid snares for the just, there had been a Witness of whose presence they thought not, but who had recorded not only each word, but each secret design of malice.

That heavenly Witness had seemed to keep silence when false oaths were sworn and false evidence was given, but He would arise at last and confound the workers of evil, and show His power and justice to those who had dared to take His great name in vain. Could we

but realize that solemn truth—God is a witness too—how calmly might innocence endure the slander of evil tongues, how fearlessly trust its cause to Him who is faithful and true!

## Chapter 19

### Belshazzar's Feast

"Will Ned, think you, be present at today's lecture?" asked Holdich of his wife on the following morning.

"I scarcely know. He was speaking to me about it last night. Oh, Robert, I thought of your words, that this terrible trial might itself be made a blessing. I never knew our poor child so thoughtfully earnest both in seeking to know what was right, and in resolving to do it, whatever the cost might be. 'Mother,' he said, 'you cannot but think that I would like to hide myself like a wounded animal, until the worst is over, but this horrible trial will be hanging over us for six weeks to come, and it might be wrong in me to shut myself up all that time from public worship, never to go to church nor attend a lecture just because of my shrinking from notice. My enemies should not be able to keep me from the house of God, and perhaps it would be well to break myself in for the trial of going to Axe, by beginning with our little cottage lecture. Then Mr. Eardley has been so kind, I could not bear to appear to neglect him.'"

"Right!" said Holdich emphatically.

"I do not think that Ned's courage will be much put to the test even if he do attend," observed Rebekah, "for it is not likely that any one, save the kind, good clergyman himself, will come near our cottage now."

Rebekah's was not an unnatural supposition, but she had not calculated on the force of curiosity in low, vulgar minds, nor that of sympathy in those of a more generous nature. Holdich's home, humble as it was, on ordinary days was the Englishman's castle, into which few would venture to intrude their unwelcome presence while affliction desired privacy, but when, on occasion of a lecture, the doors were known to be open to all who should choose to attend, scarcely a servant at the Castle, scarcely a farmer or cottager near, but determined to see "how Holdich would brave out the business," and "have a look at the lad as was going to be tried at the next assizes."

None of the men who were employed at the Walhalla, however, appeared, as they were pressed to work even beyond time in order to have the building completed, and the scaffolding removed before Wednesday the first of May, on which day a goodly company of guests were expected to grace the ceremonial of its opening.

Notwithstanding the absence of the workmen, the numbers who came thronging to the cottage, some in gay liveries, some in coarse blouses, or the laborer's picturesque smock, surprised and distressed Rebekah. She looked uneasily at her son, who, seated in the shadow of the open door, was awaiting the coming of the clergyman. Poor Ned never lifted his eyes. It seemed as if he instinctively felt the coarse stare of Valance, and knew that the threshold was darkened by Ford. But there was no audible scoff, no open insult. Whether this

was owing to the presence of the little heiress, or the determined bearing of Holdich, it is unnecessary to decide. Mr. Eardley found a large and tolerably respectful audience, when, punctual to the hour appointed, he passed through the porch into the cottage.

### Lecture 5

The mighty Nebuchadnezzar had gone to his last account, we may trust in the faith and fear of that God who had afflicted him in mercy, and restored him in love. We will not dwell long on the short reigns of his three immediate successors. The first of these was Evil-Merodach, son of Nebuchadnezzar, a king who kindly treated the captive monarch of Judah, Jehoiachin, and took him out of the prison in which he had been confined for thirty-seven long years. Evil-Merodach did not, however, tread in the path of the children of light. He was sunk in vices, and at length fell a victim to the hatred of his own relations.

He was succeeded on the throne of Babylon by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar, who had been one of the conspirators against him. This king's reign was but brief, so was that of Leborosoarchad, his wicked son, who was murdered by his subjects. Then, these usurpers being dead, Nebonid or Belshazzar mounted the throne. He is believed to have been the son of Evil-Merodach and Nitocris his queen, and therefore grandson of Nebuchadnezzar.

From that mighty conqueror and king, Belshazzar as a child might have heard the wondrous history of his life. Nebuchadnezzar's own lips might have described the joyous aspect of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as they stood unharmed in the flames. With wonder and awe the little prince might have listened to the story of the wondrous dreams, and his heart throbbed fast as he heard of the judgment which had humbled even to the dust the pride of the mightiest of men.

But Belshazzar had probably been of tender years at the time of this grandfather's death. He seems to have been unable to avenge the murder of Evil-Merodach his father, or to oppose the usurpation of Neriglissar and his wicked son and successor. While they ruled over Assyria the position of the rightful king of the realm must have been one of trial and danger. Usurpers, especially in eastern lands, usually take short and sharp measures for ridding themselves of rivals whose claims are more just than their own.

But Belshazzar was preserved by Providence to reign over the land of his fathers. Trouble and dangers indeed remained. The Medes and the Persians invaded his realm, and Cyrus, their commander, conducted their hosts even up to the mighty walls of Babylon. But to the Assyrians there seemed to be little danger that their great city could be taken, and they may have hoped that their young monarch would rival in arms the glory of his grandsire, Nebuchadnezzar, and sweep the Medes and Persians from the face of the earth, as that great king had triumphed over Nineveh, and destroyed the glorious Tyre.

Yet there was much to awaken doubt and fear in the heart of king Belshazzar, if it be true, as ancient history relates, that a spirit of prophecy came upon Nebuchadnezzar shortly before his death, and that he foretold that the kingdom of Assyria would be subdued by a Persian and Mede! There is no doubt that the destruction of Babylon was prophesied in the Scriptures possessed at that time by the Jews. The exiles in Babylon, oppressed and despised, could point to the glowing words of Isaiah, and gazing on the splendors around them, feel compassion rather than envy—*Thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon—thus about one hundred and sixty years before had written the prophet Isaiah—and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! The golden city ceased! The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them. Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.* Nay, the very name of the conqueror, Cyrus,

had been written in the sacred page. God had promised to go before him, and *open before him the two-leaved gates, and to give him the treasures of darkness!*

But Belshazzar, lifted up with pride, and intoxicated with power, was not one to search the Scriptures, or to seek to know the will of the Lord. If he had heard of such prophecies against Babylon, he had only heard to despise them. He mocked at the Medes and Persians who came as the ministers of the vengeance of a God whom he would not serve. He was as one feasting and rejoicing on the brink of a volcano even while the earth was trembling beneath, and the low rumble was heard which announced the speedy bursting forth of a torrent of flame! *Let us eat, drink, and be merry! Who is the Almighty that we should fear Him!* Such were the impious thoughts of the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, that contrite monarch who, bowing in submission to the God of Israel, had owned, *Those that walk in pride He is able to abase!*

Belshazzar the king made a grand feast for a thousand of his lords, and as he reveled and drank the red wine, he commanded his servants to bring the vessels of silver and gold, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the house of God in Jerusalem. These holy vessels, which had glittered in Solomon's magnificent temple, which had been solemnly devoted to sacred uses, were now to serve as wine-cups in heathen revels, to be drained by wicked lips, by blasphemy profaned!

As Belshazzar, his wives, and his lords drank and feasted, they praised their idols of iron, silver, and gold, nor dreaded thus to insult the majesty of the Lord, and draw down on themselves the wrath of the Ruler of heaven and earth.

Gay and gorgeous was the scene! We have but a faint image of its splendor in the picture yonder, with its thousands of glittering lights flashing in the lordly hall, upon pillars of marble wreathed with flowers, and hangings of purple and gold! Who then appeared so great or so proud as Belshazzar the king!

But why does the monarch suddenly start in the midst of his joyous revel—why does his cheek turn pale—his joints tremble—his knees smite one against another—why are his glaring eye-balls fixed on the wall before him, as if beholding some sight of horror from which they could not turn away? Lo! there the fingers of a hand, belonging to no visible body, are slowly tracing letters which no man present can read! Four words—only four—in which are summed up the fate of Babylon—the doom of its haughty ruler! Mysterious hand—awful writing! Who shall interpret its meaning!

Belshazzar cried aloud, and commanded the instant attendance of the astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. "Whosoever shall read this writing," he exclaimed, "and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

The wise men of Assyria came. With awe and terror they gazed on the mysterious writing. It was not in the wisdom of man to interpret the fearful decrees of the Lord.

The silence of the greatest of his sages increased the alarm of the king. The terror which he felt spread through the hall. The revelers, whose merriment had so lately resounded, in anxious silence gazed one upon another. The mirth of every heart was changed into fear, and the splendid robes, the sparkling gems, the sumptuous banquet, the costly wines, seemed like a mockery of misery. The shadow of death was over them all.

Then entered the queen into the banqueting-hall. This queen is believed to have been Nitocris, the widow of Evil-Merodach, and mother of king Belshazzar, a woman of a lofty soul. *She* had not come there to feast, to drink wine out of sacred vessels, but in the hour of terror she had come to give counsel to her son. Nitocris had not forgotten—or whom, if remembered, perhaps the Assyrian courtiers would not have dared to mention. Thus spake

the widowed queen of Babylon to Belshazzar, “O King, live forever! Let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed. There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father [grandfather] light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him, whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called and he will show the interpretation.”

The command was instantly given that the Jew should be brought before the king. We know not in what position Daniel and his three companions had remained during the reigns of the successors of Nebuchadnezzar. Perhaps in quiet obscurity. Perhaps sharing the bitter fate of their despised and persecuted fellow-exiles, watching and waiting for the day when the Lord should have mercy upon Israel, and restore His people to the land of their fathers.

Twenty-four, or according to some writers, thirty-four years had passed since Daniel had stood before Nebuchadnezzar the king, and warned him of coming judgment. The prophet was no longer young. Silver lines in the hair and furrows in the brow would mark the lapse of so many years. But time could but ripen the soul.

Daniel would now have fuller experience of the goodness of God, could recall more proofs of His lovingkindness than when he had explained his dream to the awe-struck Nebuchadnezzar. A saint’s treasury of memory is day by day growing richer with recollections of mercies experienced, of blessings received, and we may well believe that one of the joys of heaven will be to count over all these treasures.

Daniel entered, moved up the hall, and stood before the king. Belshazzar addressed the prophet, and promised him great rewards—the robe of scarlet, the chain of gold, the third place in the kingdom—if he would read and interpret the awful writing on the wall.

How anxiously then did the monarch and his thousand nobles watch the countenance of Daniel, as he turned, and with calm, sad eye gazed on words which no mortal hand had traced! In what an agony of suspense they listened for the first sentence which should fall from his lips! How solemn seemed the voice which first broke that stillness of expectation!

“Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another. Yet I will read the writing unto the king and make known unto him the interpretation.

“O thou king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor, and for the majesty that He gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him. Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive, and whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. And he was driven from the sons of men and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses.

“They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that He appoints over it whomsoever He will. And you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but have lifted up yourself against the LORD of heaven. And they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you, and your lords, your wives, and your concubines, have drunk wine in them, and you have praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know. And the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, have you not glorified. Then was the part of the hand sent from Him, and this writing was written.

“MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE—God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL—you are weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES—your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

The solemn words were spoken—the doom was pronounced. Belshazzar did not—as perhaps his courtiers may have expected—pour his fierce wrath upon the man who had dared to pass sentence upon him. At that moment, the impious spirit of the tyrant seems to have been subdued. He kept his kingly word. By his command, Daniel was clothed in scarlet, and proclaimed third ruler in the kingdom. But Belshazzar was not like the penitent thief, turning in contrition to God, owning his sin, and crying for mercy.

It appears from the record of history that, like another Pharaoh, he hardened his heart, and returned to his feasting and drinking, even after the warning which had thrilled his soul with terror. But the shadow of death was already falling on the threshold of his palace—his kingdom was tottering to its fall. On that same night was Babylon taken, and the wretched Belshazzar slain.

By what means was the “golden city” won, that, with its towering walls and its gates of brass, seemed able to defy the efforts of any human invader? Most striking was the means, and such as must increase our reverence for the prophecies contained in the Holy Scriptures.

Cyrus, who could not take the city by open force, had caused his soldiers with patient toil to dig a deep ditch or trench. On the night of Belshazzar’s feast, Cyrus caused an opening to be made between the river Euphrates, which flowed through Babylon, and this wide, spacious trench. The eddying waters rushed into this their new channel, and left the bed of the river so comparatively dry, that it served as a pathway for the Persians and Medes, by which they marched unopposed into the city. Was it the wisdom of Cyrus which devised this scheme, and his power that carried it into execution? The wisdom and power were given by the God who had said of mighty Babylon, through the prophet Jeremiah, *I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry. A drought is upon her waters, and they shall be dried up.*

But the gates of Babylon were wondrously strong, how could the Medes and Persians pass them? The Lord had promised to Cyrus, by the prophet Isaiah, long before the birth of the Persian prince, to *subdue nations before him*, to open before him *the two-leaved gates*, and had expressly declared *the gates shall not be shut*. And thus, in fulfilment of prophecy, on that night of riotous feasting, the Babylonians, with strange negligence, *left open the gates of brass* which shut up the descent from the quays to the river, and which alone, as the historian Rollin observes, “If they had not been left open, were sufficient to have defeated the whole enterprise.”

Thus the besiegers, unopposed, marched at night into the very heart of the golden city, and Isaiah’s warning to Babylon was terribly fulfilled: *Desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know!*

If in the position of the exiles in Babylon, the faithful worshippers of the true God, we saw an emblem of that of “the children of light” in all generations, in Belshazzar and his lords we see a picture of “the children of darkness,” those who live for self and for sin. There may be rioting and mirth in their meetings. Mirth, money, and pleasures may be theirs, but woe to them against whom the prophecy is written, *The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God!*

Their talents which should—like the golden vessels—have been devoted to the service of the Lord, are wasted or employed against Him. The Sabbaths, which He hallowed, are turned from their proper use to be filled up with business or pleasure, as the sacred cups were with wine. The children of this world are content to eat, drink, and be merry, to enjoy the present

and forget the future, and plunge deeper and deeper into that guilt for which an account must soon be given!

In vain do the ministers of God warn them that sorrow and death, like the Persians and Medes before Babylon, are pressing hard at the gate! Oh, that the careless sinners could, like Belshazzar, see written on the wall before them three solemn, soul-awakening words, Death, Judgment, Eternity! DEATH! that no human power can shut out from the happiest home. Death, that is to “the children of light” what Cyrus proved to the Jewish exiles, a friend to break their bonds, and to send them home, but which is to “the children of darkness” what Cyrus was to Belshazzar—a foe, a terror, a destroyer!

JUDGMENT! a sentence to be pronounced before assembled worlds. When hidden things shall be brought to light. When deeds of darkness shall be openly condemned. When evil thoughts, false words, wicked actions shall receive their just but terrible reward.

ETERNITY! to those whose sins have been forgiven, a word of most blessed meaning—a word which tells them that happiness which is perfect shall also be endless! But what is eternity to those who reject God’s proffered salvation? The millions of ages in which remorse, sorrow, and shame shall hold the soul in chains of darkness. Oh! while time is given us, let us flee from the wrath to come! Clinging in deep repentance and love to the feet of the Savior, death will for us have no sting, judgment will have lost all its terrors, and eternity will be our inheritance in the kingdom of light and love!

## Chapter 20

### Press of Work

Mr. Eardley had spoken with more than his wonted earnestness, and prayed with even greater fervor than usual, for the past examination and the approaching trial were full in his mind. He believed that his audience comprehended both the false accusers and the falsely accused, and he longed to have power given him to startle guilty consciences, and to press on the hearts of his hearers the solemn warnings of Scripture. Never had he felt more keenly how helpless in himself is even the faithful minister of God.

If Belshazzar, after gazing in trembling wonder on the letters on the wall, could return to his riot and feasting, till flashing swords and yells of conflict showed that the hour of vengeance had come, how could the pastor hope that his feeble warnings could move souls hardened in sin! When he looked on such bloated faces as those of Valance and Bateman, whose first thought in life had ever been, “What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?” or the yet more repulsive visage of Ford, where the stamp of cunning and malignity was so plain that even a child could read it, the painful thought oppressed Mr. Eardley that his pleading with such as these could but increase their condemnation. Were not their hearts like the trampled wayside, as little likely to receive the good seed as if paved with iron or brass?

Yet it was some encouragement to see tears in the downcast eyes of Marion. She sought to hide them, she avoided her pastor, she tried to drown the voice of warning within, but the words, Death, Judgment, Eternity, were branded on her soul, like the Mene, Tekel, Upharsin, traced on the wall of Belshazzar.

Scarcely had the clergyman finished his prayer, when the assembly noisily broke up. The members of Sir Digby’s household, like boys let loose from school, jostled each other out into

the porch, seeming to take a pleasure in showing, by their irreverent manner and the clatter of their boots, that they were glad that the service was over. The sounds of laughter which reached the ears of Mr. Eardley, from the groups sauntering along the gravel path, jarred painfully on his spirit, and Edith heard him sigh as he gently lifted her into her little fairy carriage.

“Was Daniel sad for the king and his lords,” asked the child, “when he told them the truth, and they would not care, and he knew that the enemy was coming?”

“There is nothing so sad,” replied the clergyman, “as to see warnings neglected, mercies despised, and souls that we long to save pressing on the broad way to ruin.”

Mr. Eardley did not leave the cottage at once after his short service was concluded. He had a quiet conversation with Ned. Persuaded as he was that the boy was a victim to the malice of his father’s enemies, Mr. Eardley wished to draw from his own lips an account of all that had passed, and to ascertain the state of his mind under circumstances so distressing. While Rebekah pursued household occupations upstairs, and Holdich went on his master’s business, Mr. Eardley held commune with their son.

Being of a nature frank and trustful, it was a relief to the boy to pour out his heart to one to whom he owed so much, whose sympathy soothed, and whose confidence encouraged him.

“I do not know how I shall live through these six weeks!” exclaimed the lad, “with this dreadful trial before me, and this doubt of how all will end. To look at my mother, my poor dear mother, and see her growing paler and thinner each day, and yet so good, so gentle, so kind! Oh!” added Ned with emotion, “I never knew my mother till now! When everything seemed to go well with us here, I was often impatient at her fears and cares about trifles. I was vexed that she never was cheerful and gay. Now, when everything has gone wrong, when she has losses and troubles, which I should have thought would have crushed her altogether, she is almost as calm as my father, and never murmurs or complains.”

“She is realizing more of the love of God that passeth knowledge.”

“Do you think, sir,” said Ned, “that we can see God’s love even in such a trial as ours?”

“Is it not love that snatches back, even roughly, a child from the brink of a precipice? Had you gone on in the course on which you were entering, had you made these rioters your constant companions and guides, whither would they have led you? Better, far better, to be the sufferer from their malice, than the sharer in their sins.”

Notwithstanding the cruel triumph which the steward’s enemies had appeared to have gained over him by his son’s committal for trial, they were by no means satisfied with the measure of their success. Not that any of them expected that Ned Holdich would be acquitted, but that his accusers feared that his condemnation might not, after all, effect their great object, that of forcing the man whom they hated and feared to resign the office of steward.

“I thought,” said Valance to Ford, as they chanced to meet on the following day near the mount of which stood the Walhalla—“I thought that the mere shame of such a business would have crushed all the spirit out of a fellow like Holdich, who is as careful of his character as a lady of her white satin shoes, and would rather walk ten miles round than put his foot in

the mire. But he goes about his work as stoutly, and carries his head high as ever, as if he meant to defy us to do our worst to him or his son."

"Tis the parson as backs him up," observed Ford, "and makes him think himself a martyr."

"And the worse on't is," said Valance, biting his thick nether lip, "that Sir Digby is half inclined to take the fellow's part. He seems to have a notion in his head that to throw off Holdich would be to give up the sheep-dog to the wolves."

"Not a bad notion neither," said Ford, with a short harsh laugh.

"If we could but ruin Holdich with his master," muttered Valance.

"Can't we get up some story against him? Only throw enough mud at a fellow, and some of it's sure to stick."

"It won't stick on him," said Valance, "haven't I watched him ever since he came down here, sure to find some hole to pick in his coat? But one never can catch him napping. He's always at his work, and he's up to it, keeps his accounts as reg'lar as the dial, and is more particular about other men's money than a miser would be about his own."

"He's a fool for his pains," cried Ford.

"It mayn't turn out so in the long run," said Valance, "at least if what the parson says is true."

Ford uttered a very irreverent exclamation regarding the parson, then, returning to the point, asked sharply, "But is there no way of setting Sir Digby against this Holdich? If," he added, with sudden animation, "if we could but get them to clash upon some matter of conscience."

"Ay, ay, some matter of conscience," repeated Valance, struck by the cleverness of the suggestion, "Sir Digby, he's like a hurricane, if anything crosses his will he sweeps it off in a twinkling. And Holdich, he's stubborn as steel wherever his conscience is in question."

Ford remained silent for some moments, his sinister eye, with its inward cast, seeming to be turned from outer objects to search his mischief-working brain for some evil device. Ere he spoke again a quick hurried step was heard on the marble steps of the unfinished building above, and Mr. Slimes, looking heated and annoyed, came hastily down the mount.

"Can't you come and lend a hand," he cried, impatiently to Ford, "there's one of the beams found rotten as tinder, and all that part must be done over again!"

"And the grand folk invited for Wednesday," muttered Valance, shrugging his shoulders, "I knew it would never be ready in time."

"It must and shall be ready!" exclaimed the architect, who had overheard the observation. "The men must work day and night, and the tenants must be impressed for the service. I'm just going to tell Sir Digby that we must have more hands for the building."

"I suppose that you'll be at it all the Sunday?" asked Ford.

"Of course, every hour is of value," and Slimes glanced up uneasily at the frame-work of scaffolding which crowned the mount, and which must continue to do so until the Walhalla should be completed, and the huge bronze group hoisted aloft to the summit.

“I’ll tell you what, sir,” said Ford, “I and the men under me will be ready enough to set to, if Sir Digby makes it worth our while—you understand. We’ll help with the scaffolding and such like work, and you’ll get Holdich to gather the tenants. Such as work for the farmers, will yet have the Sunday to give. And I daresay the steward himself won’t mind lending a hand to the work. He has the strength of half-a-dozen, if he only chooses to use it.” And the gardener winked at Valance, who nodded meaningly to him in return.

“I’ll speak about it at once to Sir Digby!” cried Slimes, who was in a flutter of anxiety in regard to the success of what he considered the *chef-d’oeuvre* of his art. The architect had resolved that the Walhalla should immortalize his fame as well as fill his pocket. Though in his eagerness to secure the latter object, he had risked the attainment of the first, by choosing materials cheap and showy, rather than solid and good. Extreme had been the annoyance of Slimes at finding the imperfection of some of the timber employed in the roofing, which must occasion considerable delay, and render it extremely difficult to remove the scaffolding before the day appointed for opening the Walhalla.

The exquisite decorations of the interior, the delicate ornaments, the fine stained glass, would be endangered by the rough work going on outside the building. Too impatient to produce immediate effect, and dazzle the eye by gorgeous combinations of form and color, the architect had not proceeded with caution, nor delayed adding the ornamental till the essential was thoroughly completed. The vanity of Slimes would scarcely admit the possibility of failure, but the fear of in any point coming short of the expectations of his employer almost drove him into a fever. If he worked with his own hands—if he sacrificed his sleep—the building must be finished by Wednesday.

That glittering group in bronze must be lifted to its lofty place. That disfiguring cage-work must be cleared away. The Walhalla must stand forth in its gem-like beauty, crowning its grassy hill, the center of attraction, the theme of praise, the subject of the artist and the poet, enshrining not only the fame of all the Lestranges, but that of the architect whose genius had contrived, and whose skill completed the building.

## Chapter 21

### A Sacrifice

“I will go round to each of the tenants, sir, and muster all I can for the work, and help myself if required. We will be at the building before sunrise on Monday.”

“Before sunrise *tomorrow*,” said Sir Digby Lestrangle, with an emphasis on the last word. “I am ready to give double wages for each day’s work, but I’ll have no delay, no putting off. I would not for ten thousand pounds have the Walhalla unfinished on Wednesday.”

“Do you mean, sir,” said Robert Holdich, “that you require us to work at the building on Sunday.”

“I do mean it,” replied the baronet haughtily, “it is no great matter for once to give up the seventh day’s rest.”

“If it were only the rest,” said Holdich.

Sir Digby was utterly unaccustomed to have his will crossed. He might be cheated by those who could sweeten poison with flattery, injured by those who could hide their weapons under roses, but to be thwarted by an inferior made all his pride rise up in arms. "You hear my will, and that is enough!" he said in an elevated tone, which reached other ears besides those of Holdich. "What is to hinder you, or anyone else, from doing my pleasure for once on that day which I usually permit you to keep according to your own?"

"God's commandment," replied Robert Holdich.

"Answer me this," cried the baronet, scarcely repressing the anger which was beginning to inflame his proud heart, "if my Castle, or your own cottage, were on fire upon Sunday, would you not work to put out the flames?"

"I certainly should, sir. It would be a work of necessity," the steward replied.

"And to do my will is a work of necessity for anyone who would continue in my service!" said the baronet, whose eyes flashed with angry fire.

Holdich made no reply.

"Am I to understand," said Sir Digby, whose passions like an impetuous torrent were wont to sweep all before them, but now chafed and boiled round the obstacle presented by one man's passive resistance, "am I to understand that you dare to refuse to obey the command of your master?"

Holdich was very pale, but his eye never blenched, nor his accents faltered, "I could not serve you faithfully, sir," he replied, "if I were false to a higher Master."

"Out on your puritanical cant!" exclaimed the baronet with a burst of passion, "you have made your choice and must abide the consequences. After your month is completed, I shall have no more occasion for your services. I shall look out for a steward who can not only serve but obey." And turning on his heel, the baronet walked with long rapid strides towards the Walhalla.

Holdich remained motionless for some seconds, realizing the fact that he was now indeed a ruined man. He then slowly raised his hand to his temples and pressed them, to deaden the sense of pain which, almost for the first time in his life, showed him that the strongest frame must at length be affected by mental distress. The future, with all its trials, rose before the mind's eye of the steward, and he did not turn away from the view. He must in a few weeks leave his dwelling, but he could not quit the neighborhood of Axe till his son's trial—that blackest of clouds—had discharged its burden of miseries upon him. How could Holdich maintain his family through what might be a long period of suspense? How procure for his son the legal assistance without which his condemnation appeared to be certain?

Mr. Eardley, himself almost a stranger, had done all that he could for the family—far more than he could have been expected to do. Holdich knew no other friend in Axe. At the Castle, all were enemies! He who had hitherto scrupulously obeyed the command, *Owe no man anything*, had no prospect before him of avoiding heavy debts, which might hang round his neck like a millstone for years, dragging him down to lower depths of poverty than those from which in his youth he had struggled. Holdich was in the position of a traveler in the vast desert, who, with the sun burning above, the sand scorching beneath, has delayed to the last to open his only jar of water, that its scanty supply may preserve him and his from perishing

of thirst ere a distant well can be reached, and who sees that jar overturned and broken, and its contents, precious as life's blood, sucked in by the barren sand!

And yet Holdich was not wretched, as he had been when he had sat before his dying fire on the night of his son's arrest, wrestling with a rebellious spirit, and gloomy doubts of the goodness of God. "If it is for Him that I suffer," was a thought that sustained the steward under his trial, as it has sustained martyrs and confessors from the earliest ages of the church. To him as to them, came the word with power, *Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven*. Holdich knew that no man can be really a loser by whatever he may give up for Him who disposeth at His pleasure of all the treasures of earth and heaven.

"These will be sorry tidings for my poor wife," thought Holdich, as he slowly turned towards his cottage. "Would that I could bear her share of the cross as well as my own! He who stands alone in the world presents small front to misfortune. Our sharpest pangs are those which we suffer through those whom we love."

Holdich, on his unexpected entrance, found Rebekah crying over a letter which she was writing. She started at the sound of his step, hastily dried her eyes, and tried to look up with a smile.

"I was only answering one which I received from my father this morning," she said, in a voice which quivered from the attempt to be cheerful.

"How is your poor father?" asked Holdich. The question again made the tears well up in the eyes of Rebekah.

"Of course he feels—his own position—and Ned's," she replied. "I try to comfort him as well as I can—but—" she stopped and the drops coursed fast down her cheeks.

Holdich laid his hand upon his wife's. He could not at that moment tell her that they were ruined—that they soon would be homeless.

"It is so wrong to give way!" cried Rebekah. "I have been trying so hard to feel that exiles in Babylon must be taught by troubles that their home is not here, and that sorrow is sent to make us turn with more longing desire to our Jerusalem which is above."

"All tears will be wiped away there," said Holdich, seating himself at her side. There was a subdued sadness in his tone which struck the sensitive ear of his wife.

"Oh, Robert! Any new misfortune?" she nervously inquired, clasping her hands as she spoke.

"I have offended Sir Digby," he replied.

Rebekah looked aghast at the words. Every earthly prop seemed to be breaking away beneath her. She could scarcely murmur the inquiry, "How?"

"Better let her know the worst at once," thought Holdich, and in a few sentences he told his wife of his dismissal and its cause.

"Oh," cried Rebekah, in the first burst of her anguish, "could you not have spoken him fair?"

The exclamation sounded like a reproach. Holdich was cut to the soul, and a flush rose to his sunburnt cheek and brow. But he would not have recalled the past, he would not have retraced the step which seemed to have plunged him over a chasm. He had deliberately

chosen his lot with the people of God, and bore firmly, with other trials, the reproach of her whom he loved best upon earth.

“Oh, how could I speak thus!” cried Rebekah with instant remorse, clasping her arms round her husband’s neck, and sobbing upon his bosom. “Forgive me, Robert, forgive me! You have done what was right—you have done what was wise—I am more proud of you now in your disgrace than ever I was in happier days. I would not for worlds have had you give up your conscience to win the favor of man.”

The tempest which threatens to extinguish the quivering spark, may but kindle it to brighter flame. Never had Holdich felt his wife’s heart to be so fully, so fondly his own. And never had its love been so precious to him. In that moment of mingled sorrow and sweetness, Robert and Rebekah were indeed *one*. One in feeling, in tribulation, *one in Christ*.

The somewhat stern spirit of the husband was softened to the deepest tenderness. The weaker nature of the wife was exalted into noble endurance. They would meet adversity hand in hand, strong in faith in God. And happy—yes, happy—in the sense of His love. “Rebekah has been twice given to me,” thought Holdich. And truly the second gift had been more blessed than the first.

No more was her spirit to be like the stream which, though coursing through verdant meads, chafes at every pebble, and from its own shallowness murmurs and frets as it flows. Adversity had deepened the channel. Purer, calmer, clearer, it rolled on. If it had to plunge down into depths of sorrow, it had yet sunshine resting upon it. And even from tears was that rainbow formed, which, unshaken by tumult, undimmed and unbroken, like that spanning the cataract’s verge, shines with all the soft tints of the skies!

## Chapter 22

### Oppressors and Oppressed

“Hurrah! We’ve done it at last! Flung off in disgrace—rolled in the dust—he’ll never get up again!” exclaimed Ford that evening at the supper in the servants’ hall.

“’Twas Slimes’ brazen horse as did it!” cried Parker, who, though not belonging to the household, was frequently a guest at the Castle. “Jack Paton’s trick was a good ’un, but it did not serve his turn. It galled, but it did not throw the rider. But when it came to a matter of conscience,”—the speaker finished his sentence with a horse-laugh, in which he was joined by almost all who were present.

“Here’s success to Monsieur Slimes and de Walhalla!” cried the French cook, filling his glass with a wine certainly never intended to find its way to the hall.

“Each man his toast!” said Valance, stretching out a not very steady hand towards the bottle. “Here’s to Ned Holdich, the bear’s cub in the trap. May he soon leave his country for his country’s good!”—a very thread-bare joke, which, however, called forth a fresh roar of laughter.

“Here’s to his pretty, sanctified mother!” cried Parker, “may she soon brighten with her remarkably lively presence the prison of her old father!”

“Why don’t you drink?” said Ford to Marion, who sat beside him and whose glass he had filled.

“I can’t help being sorry for her,” murmured the girl, ashamed, however, of showing even this slight mark of compassion.

“I could never be sorry for any one belonging to *him!*” cried Ford. And raising his glass on high, he exclaimed, “Here’s to Robert Holdich, the saint! As he’s a deal too honest for this world, may he soon be promoted to another.”

Amidst the jingling of glasses and roar of voices, profane jests, and laughter, Marion in vain endeavored to join in the unhallowed mirth. Mr. Eardley’s deep, earnest voice sounded still in her ears these three awful words—Death, Judgment, Eternity! In fancy she saw an invisible hand tracing them now on the wall. He who had fearfully rebuked the profane revelers of Babylon, He was present here—He was listening here, when those who bore the name of Christians profaned His name, slandered His servants, trampled on His laws, tempted His vengeance!

The unhappy girl, in the midst of her reckless companions, had a terrible consciousness of being whirled, at rapid pace and almost against her will, along the broad path which leadeth to destruction. Each hour seemed to bear her further away from that holy home whither her mother had gone, whither she had once hoped to go. She had turned her back on the heavenly Jerusalem. She had thrown in her lot with the sinners of Babylon. She was choosing her portion with the ungodly, and what would that portion be?

Even in the midst of her pity for the ruined family of Holdich, Marion regarded them almost with envy. God was on their side. God would avenge them. Every insult and wrong which they had to endure would be returned seven-fold into the bosoms of their persecutors. Marion knew this, felt this. She was sinning against light and conviction. She was aware that she was as a child bartering an inheritance for a gilded toy—as an idiot who flings away jewels to grasp at a swelling bubble. She knew that the pleasures of this world did not, could not, satisfy the soul, and yet, like a moth fluttering round the bright flame, she listened to flattery and praise, tried to laugh at what conscience condemned, and strove hard to banish the fears which her pastor’s words had awakened.

The tidings of Holdich’s dismissal, which, of course, involved that of his wife, filled with bitter distress the heart of the little heiress. Edith’s affections, like the tendrils of a vine, had already begun to cling closely to their stay. Rebekah’s gentleness and motherly kindness had endeared her to the poor little girl, and to part with her forever was a sore trial to a sensitive heart. When, according to custom, Edith joined her father at dessert, she appeared with eyes so swollen with weeping, that Sir Digby rather anxiously inquired what had troubled his daughter.

“Papa—I’m so sorry—Mrs. Holdich is going,” murmured Edith, with a trembling lip and heaving bosom, scarcely able to prevent herself from bursting again into tears.

“I’m sorry too,” said the baronet, as he raised his child to his knee, and tried in vain to divert her sorrow by heaping her plate with dainties. And Sir Digby spoke nothing but the truth. Valance had correctly expressed his master’s opinion, that to give up Holdich was to surrender the sheep dog to the wolves. A letter received from Sir Digby’s banker in London

had placed this fact before the baronet in a startling point of view. The unwelcome knowledge had been forced upon the spendthrift that he was living at a rate which his fortune could not stand, that he was preyed upon by his dependents, and he felt that he was thrusting from him the one honest man upon whose integrity he could rely, whose fidelity to God was a warrant for his fidelity to his master.

Sir Digby had never done an action in his life of which he so quickly repented, as that of dismissing his steward. Fain would he have recalled his hasty words, but pride bound him in a chain as immovable as the law of the Medes and Persians. What! humble himself to his dependent, alter his purpose, change his mind!—he could never stoop to that! The proud man was ashamed to repair a wrong, lest to do so should be to acknowledge that he had committed one. Therefore he persisted in his resolution to sacrifice the only man whom he could trust to the enmity which he more than suspected had been incurred by faithful guardianship of the interests of a master who proved so ungrateful!

Perhaps something in her father's tone encouraged Edith to pursue the conversation. "Papa," she said, resting her little head on his shoulder, and not daring to look up in his face, "if you are sorry that the Holdiches are going, could they not remain here still?"

"Impossible!" replied the baronet.

"Holdich must have done something very, very wrong," said Edith Lestrangle, with a perplexed expression in her soft, downcast eyes. "I did not think that he would. I thought that he was like one of the faithful Jews, who would rather die than break God's law."

Sir Digby gave a little uneasy cough and filled his glass with claret.

"Did he take what was not his own, papa?" Edith was not looking up at her father's face.

"No one ever accused him of that."

"Or say something that was not true?" The question, asked with childish simplicity, called forth a negative and a smile.

"What did he do wrong, papa?"

It was easier to make the inquiry than to answer it. "You have nothing to do with these matters, little one," said Sir Digby, in a tone half vexed, half good-humored. "Let us talk of the Walhalla, and of the great doings that we are to have next Wednesday." As he played with the long ringlets of his little girl's hair, the baronet continued, "I have invited all the best families in the county, and some of her Majesty's ministers from London. What say you, Edith, to entertaining a lord of the Treasury and a knight of the garter?"

The little heiress said nothing. She was thinking how formidable it would be to have to face so many grand strangers, and how gladly she would exchange the company of all for that of the friend whom she soon must lose.

"You are to receive all the guests in the Walhalla," continued Sir Digby. "When the beautiful doors are thrown open to the music of a military band, there my little daughter will appear in the center, attired like a young princess, to bid my visitors welcome."

"I shall be so frightened!" murmured the child.

"Frightened!" repeated the baronet in a tone of mock reproach, "a Lestrangle must never utter such a word! In the Walhalla all will remind you of the noble race from which you have

sprung. You will look up at the stained glass windows, and see how your gallant great-great-grandfather at Waterloo conquered the French, and how Sir Digby Lestrangle of the olden time fought in the cause of King Charles. Flags won in many a glorious field will wave over your head, and you will know that above you towers the great statue in bronze, to show that many ages ago an ancestor of yours won undying glory as a crusader. No, Edith, in the Walhalla, no scion of the house of Lestrangle can ever know what it is to be 'frightened.'"

Whether Sir Digby's arguments were unanswerable may well be doubted, but at least they were unanswered. All the grandeur, the glitter, and the glory, had little charms for Edith Lestrangle. But the child set this down to some fault in herself—she was dull, and timid, and stupid, but she would do what her father bade her do, and try to feel as he felt.

It was harder for the tender young heart to reconcile itself to the affliction and coming departure of the Holdich family. Edith sought comfort in the thought that she could ask the Lord to bless them, and if, as she suspected, wicked men had slandered the steward, she would pray morning and night that the truth might be made clear to her father. It was but recently that Edith had learned to refer her trials to God, but she did so in all the simplicity of faith, never doubting that whatever the Lord had promised He would sooner or later perform.

We will turn for a few moments from the castle of the baronet to the cottage of his steward, and take a glance at the ruined family at the close of that Saturday eve.

Rebekah is employed in mending. Ned, seated beside her, has been trying, at last with success, to wind for her a much-tangled skein. Holdich, with a number of papers spread on the table before him, and amongst them his abstract, is making entries in a large book.

"Robert," said the wife, raising her mild eyes after long silence, "is it not time for prayer and rest?"

"Yes," replied Holdich, glancing at the clock, "I must finish these entries on Monday."

"Father," observed Ned, "I wonder that you still work so hard. Since you must leave the place so soon, I should have thought that you would have cared much less about it."

"It is my duty to see that no one find my master's accounts in the confusion in which Seton left them. They were like your tangled skein, my boy. I will make the winding an easier matter for my successor. He may be an honest man."

"I shall be sorry for him if he is," said Ned.

"I should be more sorry for him if he were not," rejoined Holdich in so cheerful a tone, that a smile rose even to the lips of Rebekah.

"Ah, father, the proverb says, 'Honesty is the best policy,' you have not found it so here."

"Yet I hold to the proverb, Ned, even as regards this world. If," Holdich added more gravely, as he closed his book of accounts—"if we bring into our calculations the world to come, who can compute his loss who barter conscience for gain! Bring me the Bible, Ned."

The boy brought the well-worn Bible, and placed it before his father. Rebekah laid her work aside, and sat meekly with folded hands to listen to the Word of God.

Holdich turned to the eighth chapter of Romans, that glorious chapter of which it has been well-observed that it begins with *no condemnation*, and ends with *no separation*. As he read, the persecuted man drank in the spirit of the words, and felt his soul braced to encounter

whatever might lie before him. Was he hated and oppressed by his fellowmen? His heart gave a fearless response to the question—*If God be for us, who can be against us?* Did poverty approach his home like a ravening wolf at the door? There was comfort for the dark hour of need—*He who spared not His own Son, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?* Was his only child in peril of disgrace—of being torn from his parents by false accusation? There was One from whom no power could divide! *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution?* In full confidence in the justice and mercy of God, not with his lips only, but from his heart, could Holdich repeat the triumphant declaration, *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*

Strange as it may appear, that week of sore trial closed not unhappily in the steward's cottage. There was in that little household peace with God, and peace with one another. The heat of the furnace was felt, but affliction was doing a blessed work. Its softening effect was seen on Holdich. While all the vigor and strength of his character remained, that which might have once appeared stern and hard was melting away. Suffering was teaching him tenderness and sympathy for natures weaker than his own. He too knew what it was to suffer.

And that which softened the husband gave consistency and firmness to the wife. Rebekah was roused from her indolence and apathy. Real affliction made her blush for the fretful repining which had clouded her prosperous days. She saw her duties in a new light, and was stirred up to perform them. She was resolved, by God's aid, to be a true helpmeet to her persecuted husband.

Ned, in the same fiery trial, had learned to know himself, and the evil of the world around him. The thoughtless had begun to think, the careless had begun to pray. Little cause had the enemies of Holdich to triumph. With their insidious malice, they had succeeded in drawing a family closer to one another, and nearer to God.

Thus when, from a distance, we look upon a thick forest, it appears one mass of dark shade, unbroken, impenetrable, gloomy. We enter it, and find it intersected by paths, rugged, perhaps, and narrow, yet safe. We look up, and the light from above struggles through like a soft, green twilight, while here and there brilliant sunbeams glance like diamond shafts through the foliage, and show us that what once appeared all gloom, is instinct with life and with beauty.

## [Chapter 23](#)

### Raised Aloft

Calmly dawned the Sabbath morning, but scarcely had the level rays of the sun glittered on the meadows heavy with dew, when the noise of workmen, the sound of the saw and the hammer came from the mount of the Walhalla, like a discord to mar the hymn of nature ascending to God.

When Holdich and his son were about to start for their usual Sunday walk to the church in Axe, to their surprise Rebekah entered the parlor in bonnet and shawl.

“You mean to walk part of the way with us, wife?”

“I mean to walk all the way,” she replied. “I cannot remain here alone with those hateful sounds in my ears. With your strong arm to lean on, and the peaceful holy service to refresh my spirit at the end, the effort will do me no harm.”

Pleasant was the walk over the fields, both to Holdich and Rebekah. The primroses clustering under the hedges, the joyous birds on the wing, spoke of the watchful care of Him who clothes the lilies, and without whom not a sparrow can fall to the ground. Ned, who had shrunk exceedingly from the thought of facing a congregation in the town, where he so lately had undergone an examination under the charge of theft, found the trial more endurable when his mother was at his side. The sermon was full of consolation, and Rebekah, while listening to it, almost forgot the sense of exhaustion occasioned by unwonted fatigue.

When the service was concluded, and the Holdiches, with the rest of the congregation, were slowly quitting the porch of the church, old farmer Sterne came up with the party, and addressed the disgraced steward with mingled kindness and respect.

“My dog-cart waits yonder,” said he, “if Mrs. Holdich would let me drive her home, I shall be proud to do so, ’tis not a mile out of my way.” And looking kindly at Ned, he added, “And there’s plenty of room for the lad behind. He don’t look strong enough for the walk.”

The offer frankly made was frankly accepted. Robert and Rebekah felt kindness to Ned far more sensitively than any personal to themselves. It was no small gratification to them both that a man so much respected as farmer Sterne, should seem thus to testify before the world his belief in the innocence of their son. As the farmer with a light crack of his whip drove off, and Holdich turned to pursue his lonely walk towards his home, his heart felt lighter than it had done since the beginning of his heavy trials.

When Holdich had risen on the preceding Sunday, how little had he guessed what a steep, thorny road lay before him, or how much of sorrow would be crowded into the short space of seven days! He had then awoke, not without heavy cares, yet with the consciousness of being an independent and prosperous man. Had he known that within the opening week he would find his situation forfeited, his savings swept away, his son disgraced, his fair prospects blighted, poverty, debt, and shame hounding his steps—even Robert’s firm soul might have recoiled from so precipitous a descent into the Vale of Humiliation.

Now he had trodden the painful path, not indeed without stumbling, not without acute distress, not without a struggle with the enemy, yet grasping an unseen Hand that had borne him up, and guided him on, and that was leading him through much tribulation to peace, and honor, and glory. The Vale of Humiliation itself has its green pastures and its still waters.

“Nothing shall persuade me that there’s a black sheep in that flock,” was the mental decision of the kind old farmer as he put down Rebekah at her little garden gate. And Ned, after helping his mother to alight, turned to thank him with grateful feeling expressed in his honest blue eyes. “The godless set, who are there filling the air with the din of their work on

the Sabbath, have trumped up a shameful charge to disgrace and ruin a respectable family. But God is over all. He will bring dark things to light.”

All through the Sunday, the workmen were busy at the Walhalla, even after sunset the builders were laboring still. On the following day, the bronze group was to be lifted to its lofty place on the summit, an operation which the great weight of metal, and the steepness of the mount, rendered one of no small difficulty.

On the Monday morning, Slimes was on the spot by daybreak, hurrying to and fro in a state of nervous excitement. Relays of men were set to work the windlasses, the nature of the ground and the position of the building preventing the use of horse-power. The wheels creaked, the ropes strained, the men with a “yo-e-o” put forth their utmost efforts. The huge statue could scarcely be stirred from its place.

At length, after great exertions, the men succeeded in raising it from the ground. Slowly rose the gigantic mass—so slowly, that Edith, who watched it from her window, could only tell that it moved at all by noticing how from hour to hour the space between it and the earth had increased. Now she could see the tops of bushes beyond it. Now a certain beam of the scaffolding was hidden from view. Now the crest on the knight’s helmet was on a level with the top of the pine.

The men became at length exhausted by their long-continued exertions under the heat of a glowing sun. Neither the liquor nor the promises freely lavished amongst them could put spirit into their toil. It seemed as if that glittering knight and horse would never rise to the pedestal, but must remain suspended by thick ropes to the beams between earth and sky.

Slimes, far more eager to form projects than quick to foresee difficulties in carrying them out, had undercalculated the force needful for raising the brazen group. The men, weary and dispirited, wiped their heated brows, threw themselves down on the grass, and declared that nothing could be done unless more assistance were obtained.

“Never give up, my lads!” cried Holdich, who had come to the spot to see the progress of the work. “Put your heart to the labor, and your hand to the wheel, and we’ll have the statue up before sunset.” To give an example to the rest, Holdich himself grasped the handle of one of the windlasses, and succeeded in inspiring the weary workmen with some of his own resolute energy.

“See, see, papa, how bravely Holdich is working!” exclaimed Edith, who was accompanying the baronet and Slimes in one of their frequent visits to the mount.

“Ay,” said Sir Digby, looking with admiration at the athletic form, whose muscular powers were brought into full play. “Holdich is no bad specimen of the hardy Saxon, such as those whose bows and bills gave such a rude welcome to our Norman ancestors at Hastings.”

Edith knew nothing of Saxons or of Hastings, but she saw that her parent was pleased, and with the instinct of a peacemaker, remarked, “Holdich is trying with all his might to have your beautiful Walhalla all ready for Wednesday.”

“He has the cunning of his class,” observed Mr. Slimes, who bore a personal grudge against the steward. “This man hopes by his energy to make his master forget his insolence, and so change his mind regarding his dismissal. Low natures like his little understand those more refined and exalted.”

"I never forget and I never change," said the haughty baronet, unconscious that his pride was as a cord by which his sycophants led him whithersoever they would.

Perseverance and energy at length overcame difficulties which had seemed insurmountable. The statue, raised on high and swung over its pedestal, glittered in the rays of the evening sun, and as it was slowly lowered to its place, a loud exulting shout of triumph burst from workmen and bystanders. The almost exhausted laborers retired to enjoy needful refreshment and repose, and prepare for future toils. The next day was to be employed in removing the immense framework of scaffolding which had been required for raising the group, and in clearing away the heaps of rubbish which encumbered the mount. Not a splinter, or a shaving, or a speck of dust must mar the beauty of the Walhalla at the ceremony of the opening.

As might have been expected at a time of unusual exertion and excitement, none of the dependents of Sir Digby Lestrangle, except the family of Holdich, cared to attend the Tuesday lecture. It cost Edith some tears even to persuade Marion to take her to the cottage of the steward.

"I could not bear," cried the child with emotion, "to miss the lecture this time, now that my dear teacher's husband is going to be sent away, and her son is in trouble, and all the world seems against them—it would almost break my heart if she thought that I could desert her too."

The steward went out a short distance to meet Mr. Eardley, wishing to be the first to inform him of his own dismissal from the service of Sir Digby Lestrangle. Coming quickly to the point, after his first respectful salutation, Holdich remarked, "I fear that this must be almost your last lecture here, sir, unless the next steward be of my way of thinking."

Mr. Eardley was startled and distressed. "You are not going to leave?" he hastily asked.

"Next week," replied Robert Holdich.

"I hope that you are not about to take such a step without due consideration," said the clergyman, as they walked together towards the cottage. "I know that you have much to bear here, but you are not, unless I be much mistaken in you, one to leave your post simply because you find it a hard one."

"I have no choice, sir. I have been dismissed," said the steward.

Mr. Eardley suppressed the exclamation which rose to his lips. "May I ask for what cause?" asked he.

"A question of Sunday work," was the brief reply, as Holdich threw wide open the door of his cottage to admit the pastor.

It was with painful emotion that Mr. Eardley crossed the threshold of that dwelling from which the occupants were so soon to be driven forth into the world. This, then, was the result of an honest man's attempt to serve both his God and his master, to stem the tide of corruption, to do his duty in the midst of temptation. The attempt resolutely, faithfully, prayerfully made, had ended in his ruin and disgrace! What profit was there in uprightness? Satan whispered the suggestion even to the enlightened mind of the minister of God, but it was instantly repelled as sin.

Mr. Eardley looked on the countenances of Holdich and his wife—both bore traces of the effect of trial, both were paler and thinner, but both wore that stamp of inward peace for which worldly prosperity would be but a poor exchange. That of Robert expressed calm confidence, unswerving trust in God’s mercy and truth—that of Rebekah, the meek submission which bends to kiss the rod. The fretful complaining spirit was subdued.

As the minister surveyed the afflicted pair, the lesson was impressed on his own soul, that it is possible for men to be gainers by losses, and *more than conquerors* in seeming defeat. He silently thanked God that this world’s Babylon has its Daniels still, not only amongst the great, but the lowly, and that in bringing the children of light through great tribulations, God still performs the daily miracle of shutting the mouth of lions, and quenching the violence of fire!

## [Chapter 24](#)

### The Den of Lions

#### Lecture 6

Cyrus the Persian was lord of Babylon, and to the horrors of the night of slaughter succeeded the pomp and glory which marked the conqueror’s reign. Mildness and moderation appear to have been characteristics of this remarkable man. Of this he gave a singular proof in his conduct towards his uncle Cyaxares the Mede, or as he is called in the Bible, Darius. After arranging affairs in the conquered city, Cyrus went back to Persia, and bringing his uncle thence, returned with him to Babylon, where he made Darius share with him that throne which his own valor had won. Nay, so far did the young conqueror carry his respect for his uncle, that, with singular freedom from jealousy or ambition, he gave Darius the first rank in the state, which the Mede enjoyed during the remainder of his life. Cyrus, throughout this period, was much engaged in foreign conquests, leaving his uncle to conduct the government alone in Babylon.

Darius and Cyrus concerted together a plan for ruling their mighty empire. They divided it into a hundred and twenty provinces, each with a governor of its own. Over these were set three ministers, of whom one was of higher dignity and greater power than the rest. So lofty a post as that of chief minister of the grandest empire in the world, must have been an object of ambition to the greatest of the lords who had fought under Cyrus, or attended the court of the Mede. But who was selected for the post? An aged man, who, save by reputation, must have been unknown either to the Median or the Persian monarch. A former minister of Nebuchadnezzar—but not of Babylonish blood—one of a conquered race. Daniel, the captive Jew, was chosen amongst the thousands of eager aspirants to fill the office of highest trust. He was preferred above the presidents and the princes, because an excellent spirit was in him, his was the wisdom which comes from above.

We thus a second time behold Daniel the most powerful subject in Babylon, devoting his time and his energy to fulfil the duties of his responsible office. But the very greatness to which God had raised him made Daniel the mark for envy. The highest mountain attracts the

cloud, the loftiest tree the lightning. A good man raised to earthly distinction is almost certain to become the object of envy, hatred, and fear.

“Who is this son of a slave!” would the haughty Persians exclaim, “that we should bend in homage to him?” The corrupt satraps who thronged the Median court would dread the watchful eye of one who administered justice without partiality and without fear. The natural hatred borne by the children of this world towards the children of light acquired tenfold strength from such envy and such dread. To disgrace Daniel, to ruin the detested Jew, became the one absorbing desire of the princes of the Babylonish court. They watched his steps, they scrutinized his actions, like men who survey a hostile fort in eager hope to detect some weak point that may lie open to attack. Could they but discover some error in judgment, some inconsistency in conduct, how envy would triumph, how malice would exult, how hatred would magnify the offence!

Nothing can give us a higher idea of the spotless integrity of Daniel than the fact that even his watchful enemies could find no fault in his actions. David, when surrounded by such foes, had written, *When my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me*, but so great were the wisdom and grace bestowed upon Daniel by God, that, as far as man could see, his steps never faltered nor slipped.

Not that we must for one moment imagine that Daniel stood before God in any righteousness of his own, that even he in the judgment could plead his good works, or the purity of his life. One of the lowliest confessions of sin contained in the Holy Scriptures came from the lips of Daniel, the upright minister of King Darius.

After the unsuccessful efforts of the princes in Babylon to find a flaw in the character of Daniel, with a cunning which Satan must himself have inspired, they resolved to turn his very virtues against him. “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel,” said his enemies, “except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” The device fixed upon by these wicked conspirators could only have had effect under one of the weakest and vainest of monarchs, and we can entertain no doubt that Cyrus was absent at the time. Darius, like his predecessor Belshazzar, must have been intoxicated with power, or he could never have entertained, far less granted, the strange petition now offered by the princes.

“King Darius, live forever!” thus was the Mede addressed by his fawning courtiers. “All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statue, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.”

The pride of Darius was flattered by the impious proposal, which should have filled him with disgust. He put his hand to the fatal decree, little dreaming for what a horrible purpose his consent to it had been sought.

And what was the conduct of the aged minister when he heard of the infamous law? Could he be debarred from prayer to God—that which to the children of light is their “native air,” nay, their “vital breath?” Could any ordinance of man bar his access to the throne of grace? But the thought suggests itself to the mind, “Prayer need not be audible in order to be

earnest. The heart may pray while the lips are silent. Daniel might think on God in his bed, and remember the Lord in his waking, without bowing the head, or bending the knee, or doing aught that might betray to man his exercise of devotion.”

It is true that Daniel might have done this. He might thus have worshipped God, and yet have escaped the den of lions. Probably the consciences of most men would have been satisfied with such prayer. But though Daniel lived ere the Savior uttered the words, *Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven*, he acted according to their spirit. The cold, calculating, timid obedience, which is always trying to reconcile interest with duty, was not the obedience of the prophet. He was not ashamed of his colors. He dared to serve God openly, let the consequence be what it might.

And Daniel must also have had regard to the effect of his influence and example upon others. Every servant of God must so let his light shine before men, that they may glorify his Father which is in heaven. In the midst of a hostile world, the Christian should, as it were, set up his banner, that others beholding it may rally around it, and stand up with him for the truth. This was the reason, we may well believe, why Daniel performed his devotions almost as if he courted observation. With his windows open towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and gave thanks to his God.

With eager triumph, sure now that their enemy would soon be their victim, the wicked conspirators carried tidings to the king that his law had been broken, and that his honor was pledged to execute his horrible decree. “That Daniel,” they cried, “which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree which thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day.”

Darius, with grief and remorse, perceived the snare which had been laid to entrap the noblest of his subjects. Bitterly displeased with himself for the evil which his profane pride had wrought, he set his heart on delivering Daniel from the terrible fate with which he was threatened. But the law of the Medes and Persians was one which altered not. He who had made the decree had not the power to recall it! How often we seek in vain to undo the evil carelessly wrought! Like the arrow once launched from a bow is the word of folly or sin. We cannot arrest it in air. Our anguish cannot recall it, though it wing its way to a heart that we love. Those led astray by our evil example may go wandering on to destruction, though we be brought back to the fold. We cannot change the irrevocable past either by our remorse or our tears. Let this make us more earnestly seek to *redeem the time* which is yet our own.

At the hour of sunset, the miserable king, baffled in his anxious endeavors, gave the horrible command which was to be but too readily obeyed. Agonizing must have been to Darius the sight of that venerable form, that head silvered by age, which he himself was devoting to the fangs of the ravaging lions.

Daniel seems to have uttered no entreaties, to have breathed no word of reproach. It was perhaps his calm and peaceful aspect that wrung from a heathen monarch such words as we should rather have expected from one of the faithful three who dared the fiery furnace. “Thy God, whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee!” cried Darius.

A terrible night was that which followed to the Median king. He could not touch the richest dainties. The sweetest music he could not endure. He could not close his eyes in sleep—and it was well, perhaps, that he could not, for what would his dreams have been but of horror and blood, savage wild beasts growling over their mangled prey! Very early in the morning, Darius arose, and with a spirit trembling between hope and fear, he hastened to the mouth of the den of lions.

How had the prophet passed the night? We see him depicted yonder, surrounded by savage beasts that have lost all their fierceness for him. The place is not dark, though it is night, for an angel from heaven is in it, and his presence is as the sunshine. He has shut the mouth of the lions, and Daniel is as safe amongst them as the shepherd amidst his snowy flock. The prophet can tranquilly pillow his head upon the mane of a lion, and commending himself to the care of his God, sleep peacefully as a child.

Perhaps Daniel was wakened from slumber by the lamentable voice from without, which cried, “O Daniel, servant of the living God! is thy God, whom you serve continually, able to deliver you from the lions?”

With what unutterable relief must the king have heard the calm reply from within, in which not even the common form of addressing a monarch was omitted, “O king! live forever. My God has sent His angel and has shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me, forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me, and also before you, O king, have I done no hurt.”

Then was Darius exceeding glad, and at his command the prophet was raised from the wild beasts’ den. Unharméd he came forth, and more than ever an object of honor and regard. While Darius, with terrible retribution, flung all his accusers into the den, where they suffered the fearful fate which they had reserved for another.

Let us now apply to ourselves, dear friends, the lesson which this wonderful history of Daniel is intended to convey. The point on which I would dwell today is, the devotion of the children of light.

How precious must be the privilege of prayer, since rather than forego it for awhile, the prophet was ready to endure a death from which nature recoils! Prayer was to him more than life. What is prayer unto us? Is it a weary task? Is it a lifeless form? Is it a petition which we offer as a duty, but in which we find no pleasure, and to which we expect no reply? This is not *the prayer of faith*.

We must come to our heavenly Father as children, in the name of His blessed Son, not only hoping, but being fully assured that He will listen to our cry, that He is more ready to hear than we to pray, and that He will certainly grant our prayer, unless what we ask for be not a blessing. In heaven, the children of light will find that the prayer of faith has never been unanswered, though perhaps it was answered in a different way from what they expected or desired.

The sisters of Lazarus doubtless prayed with deepest fervor that their brother might be saved from the tomb. The answer came, deferred, not denied—their brother was *raised from the tomb*. When our blessed Lord was led before Pilate, in what anguish must his mother and apostles have wrestled in prayer that He might be spared the anguish of the cross! Had such

prayer been granted, the world would have perished. Nay, their own souls would have been lost! Infinite mercy could not grant such petition, but who can say that it drew not down a richer harvest of blessing on those whose rapturous cry was so soon to be, *The Lord is risen indeed!*

Pray without ceasing, then, dear friends. Pray for yourselves, for others—pray for the whole church of God. Pray that earthly wants may be supplied, earthly blessings granted according to the will of Him who knows what is good for man. But above all, earnestly seek for the treasures of wisdom and grace, for the Holy Spirit that is sent to comfort, enlighten, and guide. Take the God of truth at His word, plead the promise of the Savior, *Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find.*

## Chapter 25

### The Grand Fete

Never had a First of May dawned with greater brilliancy and beauty than that on which was to be celebrated the opening of the Walhalla. The inmates of the Castle were early astir. Slimes, in a state of joyful excitement, wandered to and fro, superintending arrangements, and surveying, with that peculiar delight which men only take in works of their own, the glittering beauty of the edifice which had sprung from his inventive genius.

All the peasants who dwelt within the circuit of several miles, and half of the population of Axe, wended their way along the roads and footpaths towards the center of attraction—the bronze group seen above the trees—to listen to the military band, watch the arrival of distinguished guests, and gaze with admiring wonder upon the completed Walhalla.

The greatness of the baronet was more than ever impressed on the minds of his tenants. Recognizing his likeness in the statue which glittered on high, many a remark was made by the people as to how grand Sir Digby looked, holding his sword aloft, and seeming as if he would ride on his golden horse as a conqueror over the land.

At mid-day, various illustrious guests arrived by the train from London—handsome carriages had been sent to meet them, and at about the same time came such of the neighboring gentry as had been honored by invitations.

“Eight—nine carriages—and here comes another with four horses, postilions in scarlet, and a coronet upon the panel!” exclaimed Ned, who watched the passing of the gay vehicles from one of the creeper-mantled windows of the cottage. “Oh, mother,” he added with a heavy sigh, as bitter recollection mingled with the natural excitement caused in a young mind by so brilliant a scene, “how eagerly and joyfully I once looked forward to this day! I expected to be one of the foremost and gayest of the crowd, to look on all the grandeur, and join in all the cheers, and now the day has come, and I dare not so much as show my face!” The poor boy turned from the window, seated himself at the table, and his head sank on his folded arms.

“My Ned, my own boy,” said Rebekah, bending tenderly over her son, with her hand on his shoulder, “we must not let our courage forsake us. Remember yesterday’s lecture.”

“I do not see what comfort that can give me,” exclaimed Ned, abruptly raising his head. “Daniel was cast into the den of lions because he did what was right. I am thrown into all this misery because I did what was wrong!”

"I did not mean that you could find comfort in the story of Daniel," said Rebekah, "though your father might," she added, "for he had come into trouble because he obeyed God rather than man, but I meant that you—I—all—can take comfort from what we heard about prayer."

"Mother," asked Ned, while his lip quivered with emotion, "do you think that if we pray hard to God he will clear me from this horrible charge that is breaking my heart?"

"I hope it," Rebekah faintly replied.

"Do you believe that He will raise my father—all of us—out of this slough of poverty into which we seem to be going deeper and deeper every step that we take?"

"I think it," said Rebekah more hopefully, "for it is written regarding what we need to supply earthly wants, *See ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

"And do you think, mother, that a time will ever come when we shall be thankful even for the troubles which now are so hard to bear?"

"I am sure of it," said Mrs. Holdich, raising her eyes which were glistening with tears, "if we ask in these troubles for that faith which 'turns the dust of earth to gold!'"

All further conversation on the subject was interrupted by the unexpected entrance of Edith, followed by Marion her maid. The child was so splendidly attired for the grand ceremony of the day, that she looked a strange guest in the lowly cottage of the steward. Magnificent flounces of costly lace fell over a dress of richest silk. The necklace round her thin little throat, the fillet which bound her hair glittered with jewels of price, and the small foot which trod so feebly wore a delicate white satin shoe.

But the poor little heiress, in all her splendor, had a piteous half-frightened look, and it was as one who seeks for sympathy or protection that the baronet's daughter took the hand of the steward's wife.

"Oh! Mrs. Holdich, won't you come with me?" she said in a tone of entreaty.

"Where do you wish me to come?" Rebekah answered, caressing the child.

"Into the Walhalla, that grand place, where I am to stand in the middle with no one but Marion near, to wait till the doors are thrown open, and all the great people and ministers come in. I'm to receive them, because, papa says, I am the queen of the day. But I don't want to be a queen. I don't want to stand there, I can't bear it, I am so frightened! I can't help it," added Edith with tears, as if she were confessing a sin, "I can't help being dreadfully frightened, though I am of the house of Lestrangle!"

"You must think of your father's wishes, my love."

"Papa tells me to think of all my great ancestors," said Edith, "and I try to obey, but it does not help me at all. Is it very naughty not to care very much about all the grand battles that were fought hundreds and hundreds of years before I was born?"

Rebekah met the anxious inquiring gaze with a smile.

"You will come with me, won't you? I shall be braver if you are beside me," and Edith, who still held the hand of her friend, tried gently to draw her to the door.

"I cannot go, dear Miss Edith, because on a grand occasion like this Sir Digby might not wish to see me in the Walhalla. Go, dear child, it is your duty to go. In these things as well as in greater things, we are only happy when doing our duty."

Sadly, but submissively Edith let go the hand of her friend, but as she turned towards the door the child murmured, "I wish that I were not an heiress!"

"Poor lamb!" thought Holdich, who entered at that moment, "you will not long be one if your father give many entertainments such as that of today." Then addressing himself to

Edith, the steward told the little girl that, everything being ready, Sir Digby wished her to go at once to the Walhalla, to which he was about to conduct his guests.

“Will you help me up the steps?” said the poor feeble child, “there are so many, and they tire me so!”

Gently and respectfully the steward assisted the little invalid to mount the flight of white marble steps which led to the door of the Walhalla. There he left Edith with her attendant, and descended to the open space in front of the building, which was fenced round by a temporary barrier, to keep back the eager crowd of spectators, who clustered like bees around it.

“That’s Holdich, that’s he whose son is to be tried at the next Assizes,” so ran the murmur through the throng.

“He’s dismissed”—“Not the man for the place. Couldn’t wink when things went wrong.”—“He has a kind heart, if ever man had. He walked over to Axe for a doctor, when my poor child was in fits.”

While these whispers were interchanged between the rustics, the unconscious object of their remarks stood in an attitude of thought, gazing upwards at the Walhalla. Was Holdich admiring the gorgeous structure, with its rich frieze, its many-colored marbles, its adornment of waving flags, or was he criticizing the questionable taste which had raised so fanciful a pedestal for the bronze equestrian group?

Perhaps the steward was doing neither. While his eye rested on that building which had plunged his master into debt, and been the cause of his own disgrace, Holdich was probably reflecting on the childish eagerness with which the men of this world follow the phantom of pleasure, careless as to what they may throw away, or upon what they may trample in their restless pursuit.

“Is it not glorious!” exclaimed a voice behind Holdich. Slimes also was gazing up at the building in which the delighted architect beheld the finished monument of his own genius. While at the same moment a loud burst of military music announced the approach of Sir Digby and his guests.

“Ha! What’s that!” exclaimed Holdich, whose quick ear had caught a sound different from the clash of cymbals, or the roll of drums.

“See, the statue!” cried the architect in such tones of horror and amazement as might have been his had the huge figure before his eyes suddenly started into life. The uplifted sword of the brazen knight was slowly changing its position, the helmeted head bending forward, then—

“’Tis coming down—God help the child!” exclaimed Holdich, and before the words had died on his lips, he had darted up the steps and into the Walhalla.

Slimes remained rooted to the spot, his lips apart, his eyes almost starting from his head, like one who knows that a match is being applied to a mine beneath him, and who awaits, in petrifying terror, the shock of the awful explosion. He heeded not—hardly heard the wild cries from hundreds of voices, that of an agonized father rising above all.

Then it came—the thundering crash—louder than peal of artillery, making the very earth tremble, deafening the ear, confusing the senses. The roof of the Walhalla had proved unable to support the weight of metal placed upon it—first one of the beams had given way, making the statue sink forwards, then the whole mass had come crashing to the ground—knight and horse—conqueror and conquered—bearing down all the roof and half the walls in their fall!

Such a cloud of dust arose that for some seconds the Walhalla—or its ruin—was almost completely hidden from view. Sir Digby, with the gestures of a maniac, was rushing wildly up the steps in search of the child whom he could only expect to find a crushed and mangled corpse, when a man emerged from the dust and wreck, dragging with one hand a senseless body, while with the other he pressed to his breast a little helpless form. Hair, brows, dress, covered with mortar and dust, he came forth, heavy red drops falling from his temple.

The baronet did not at once recognize the face of his child's preserver. We need not tell the reader that this was Robert Holdich. Warned by a sudden cracking sound, he had dashed into the Walhalla in time—scarce in time—to snatch the unconscious child and her maid from the spot on which, almost at the same moment, the crashing mass had descended. Had Holdich hesitated but for one second, Edith's form would have lain, crushed out of the semblance of humanity, under the weight of the tons of metal which had embodied her father's pride.

A falling beam had struck Marion. Holdich himself had been hit by a splinter, but he had borne the little child in safety out of the mass of ruins in which she so nearly had found her grave.

But the nerves of the young invalid had received a great shock. She had swooned at the noise of the crash, and when Holdich placed her in her father's arms, the wretched parent at first believed that he was receiving the corpse of his child. Edith was instantly carried to the Castle, and every means used to restore her, under the directions of the most eminent surgeon of the day, who happened to be one of the guests.

In his agony of anxiety for his daughter, the baronet had scarcely a thought to give to the ruined Walhalla. Let fortune, honors, everything go, so that his darling be but spared—so that he be not left on the earth a childless, desolate man! Edith's irons were instantly removed, her limbs chafed, every restorative applied, but it was some time ere the returning consciousness of the heiress left the surgeon at leisure to examine the hurts of her poor young maid.

He found that Marion had sustained a compound fracture of the right arm above the elbow, besides severe bruises on the face. While every tongue was uttering anxious inquiries for the baronet's daughter, how few knew, how few cared to ask, whether the poor servant maid had received injuries more permanent and severe!

Even Ford, whose flatteries had had such power over the girl—who, more than any other being, had drawn her thoughts away from her God—merely shrugged his shoulders in careless pity when he heard that Marion was in all probability both disabled and disfigured for life.

"Poor soul, she's had a short time for her merry-making," said he, "she little guessed this morning how soon she's come to the poorhouse. I don't believe Sir Digby will look after her, mayhap the parson will!" And Ford quaffed off his porter with as much unconcern as if he had been speaking of a stranger.

## [Chapter 26](#)

### After-Thoughts

"Robert! Oh, thank God you are safe! For mercy's sake, tell me what has happened!" exclaimed Rebekah. The sound of the awful crash had drawn her and Ned in terror from the cottage.

"Father bleeds!" cried the boy in alarm.

“Tis nothing, a mere scratch,” said Holdich, whose appearance might well raise anxious fears in the hearts that loved him. “I came at once to relieve your minds. I thought that you might hear false reports. The dear child is unharmed, God be praised! She had a narrow, most narrow escape.”

Trembling and pale with nervous excitement, Rebekah was about to follow her husband into the cottage, but he stopped in the porch.

“Nay, dear wife, you must not stay here, that poor girl Marion will need you. She is, I fear, grievously hurt, and must not be left to the tender care of Mrs. Bateman.”

“I will only bind your wound, and—”

“Mine is nothing, Ned will see to that,” said Holdich, “go, and take your Bible with you, and mind, I shall not be surprised if you are detained all night.”

Again rose the old spirit of disobedience in the bosom of Rebekah, but its power of resistance was broken. Her kindly feelings were interested in the fate of the unhappy Marion. Rebekah made her few necessary preparations, gave careful directions to Ned, brought him hot water and linen, and then, though with lingering reluctance, started off for the Castle.

Holdich in the meantime had entered the inner room, and there his son found him on his knees, silently returning thanks for his own preservation and that of the little child. Never had Holdich felt that his life was staked upon such a desperate cast, as when, convinced that the roof was about to fall in, he had rushed into the Walhalla. Had he literally sprung into a den of lions to rescue Edith from their fangs by the strength of his weaponless arm, he would scarcely have deemed the danger more imminent than when, with timber crashing, beams bending, plaster falling above him, he had each second expected that the enormous mass of metal would come down and crush him to atoms.

A thought of Rebekah, his poor wife, had flashed like lightning through his brain at that terrible instant. But Holdich had encountered the danger with the resolution of one who habitually feels that life and death are in the hand of God, and that the Christian need fear no evil. They have little cause to shrink from peril, to whom death itself is but a gain.

Ned had stood for a moment at the door, afraid to intrude on his parent’s devotions, when Holdich arose from his knees. There was not a trace of excitement in the manner of the steward, as composedly he washed the blood and dust from his face, as if the fearful scene through which he had passed was an ordinary occurrence of life. He bade Ned go over to Axe, and inform Mr. Eardley of what had happened. “That poor girl should, at least,” he observed, “have the help of a good man’s prayers.”

If the nerves of Holdich were firm and unshaken, the case was very different with Sir Digby Lestrangle. The concentrated horror of the moment when he had beheld the bronze equestrian group disappear through the roof, crashing down half of the Walhalla in its thundering fall—that moment when he believed that his only child was buried beneath it, had almost unsettled his reason.

Sir Digby at first lost all self-command, every nerve was quivering, his brain seemed on fire. Though he received his daughter from the arms of Holdich, he knew not who had borne her from the ruin. His mind, like a sea in a storm, could reflect no object distinctly. This terrible state lasted but for a while. As Edith revived, as her soft little hand returned the

pressure of his own, as her wistful, wandering eyes met his, the father became more capable of thought, though still trembling with nervous excitement.

He could comprehend what the surgeon said. He understood that his child was only suffering from the effect of a terrible shock. The whole system hitherto pursued in regard to Edith must be changed. On this point the surgeon was decided. There must be no more irons to repress free circulation, no more weights on the weak little limbs. Generous diet, refreshing baths, gentle friction, change of air and of scene, such were the remedies prescribed by one who was universally acknowledged to stand at the head of his profession.

As long as Sir Digby's anxiety regarding Edith continued intense, he had no thought to spare for his guests. He had been unable even to preside at the grand banquet prepared in the Castle. It was strange how little the host was missed by those who shared his profuse hospitality. At first the attention of all had been absorbed by the catastrophe so recently witnessed. Even the most careless were solemnized for a time. The ladies were nervous and pale. The state of the little girl, and the grief of her father, awoke very general sympathy.

But when the guests were satisfied that Edith was likely to recover, they began with more of curiosity than of regret to examine the scene of the disaster, to speculate upon its probable cause, and to comment pretty severely on the folly and incapacity of the architect, who, but an hour before, had received their congratulations and praise. The reputation of Slimes appeared to be ruined forever. He himself had left the Castle in a state of despair. His aspiring ambition seemed to have fallen with the Walhalla. His pride—though but for a brief space—lay crushed beneath its ruins.

After a while the guests, according to the baronet's request conveyed in a message through Valance, repaired to the banqueting hall, to partake of a sumptuous repast. Except that carriages were ordered at an earlier hour than would have been the case had the Walhalla remained in its glory, and that the stately baronet himself was not at the head of the table, there was little to indicate that any remarkable event had occurred.

The conversation flowed easily on politics and other common topics of the day, and if the fate of the Walhalla sometimes was still the theme of remarks, they were undertoned speculations as to the amount of money which must have been sunk in the building, and conjectures as to whether Sir Digby would rebuild it on a different plan.

Such observations of course ceased when the baronet himself joined his guests, looking very haggard and ill from the effect of recent excitement. He made efforts so fitful and so evidently painful to support the character of a hospitable host, that it was almost as great a relief to his visitors as it was to himself when carriage and carriage was announced, and gradually—too gradually for Sir Digby's impatience—the goodly company departed.

The bowing, and smiling, and handing were over, the mask could be torn away, and misery at least be not forced to assume the aspect of mirth. And Sir Digby was very miserable, oppressed with burning headache, and with spirits sunk to their lowest ebb. Another communication from his man of business in London had been but a sorry preparation for a day of pleasure, still less for a day of pain. The spendthrift had been reminded in forcible terms of the absolute necessity of curtailing expenses, and diminishing

his establishment, even residence abroad had been hinted at, that the estate might be nursed for the next ten years.

Sir Digby had indeed flung away the letter in a passion of rage, but he could not erase its contents from his mind, and strangely mingling with them came recollections of the fate of one whose sin—like his own—had been pride! Was—in his case also—the goodly tree to be cut down, its branches laid in the dust, its fruit scattered afar?

He had on that day been well-nigh crushed by an awful judgment, his only child destroyed by the monument of his presumption and pride! That judgment had indeed been averted, but the wreck of the Walhalla remained as a warning and a type. So shall perish all the pomps and vanities of the world, from the lofty tower of Belus to the gay trifles which now engross the thoughts of beings born for immortality.

Ah! reader, on what is your heart now set? Is it on that which will “stand the fire”—on that which time cannot change, nor eternity itself destroy?

As if drawn by a strange attraction towards the Walhalla, the baronet bent his steps in the direction of the little mount which it had crowned so proudly in the morning. Several workmen and rustics were loitering about the ruins to gratify natural curiosity, exchanging coarse jests which it was well that the lord of the place did not hear. They slunk away on seeing Sir Digby, and left the dark-browed, melancholy man to the seclusion which he sought.

Striking, indeed, was the contrast presented by the Walhalla when the sun’s rays sloped from the west, to its appearance when his morning beams had glanced from the fairy structure! Part of the front of the building was still standing, a spectral skeleton of its former self, but the concussion had shattered every pane in the windows, and through those eyeless holes, disfigured with fragments of colored glass, the gaze rested on a chaos of confused wreck, wood, marble, plaster, portions of fresco, half hiding, half revealing the huge fragments of the colossal group, which had been broken by the height of its fall. One minute had done the work of ages—the desolation was complete!

Sir Digby gazed sternly for some time on the ruins, and then turned gloomily away. As he reached the bottom of the mount, which was strewn with loose mortar, dust, and rubbish, he suddenly encountered Mr. Eardley, who was returning from the Castle, and intending to visit the steward’s cottage on the way.

The clergyman felt the meeting somewhat embarrassing. He had gone to Castle Lestrange with the view of seeing the unhappy Marion, who might be, he thought, at the point of death. He had learned that she was in a state of delirium, which would render all spiritual instruction useless. Grieving over the poor wandering sheep suddenly arrested in her downward course by an accident so fearful, the burdened heart of the pastor was relieving itself by silent prayer, when he met Sir Digby Lestrange coming down from the scene of the disaster. Both stood still for a moment, and then the clergyman addressed Sir Digby not as the baronet, but the father.

“Allow me to congratulate you from my heart on the merciful preservation of your sweet little child.”

Mr. Eardley spoke from the depth of his soul, and Sir Digby knew that he did so. Those few words went warm to a heart which had felt itself desolate and alone. The baronet held

out his hand, and returned Mr. Eardley's grasp with kindly pressure. The proud spirit was so far humbled as to acknowledge to itself the need both of sympathy and of counsel.

"I came hither thinking that the poor servant girl, who is a sufferer, might wish to see a clergyman," said Mr. Eardley, desirous to show that no intrusive curiosity had drawn him to the Castle.

"You are welcome," said the baronet gravely, "I hope that you will return to the Castle and rest." These were the first words of kindness which the clergyman had ever heard from those haughty lips.

"Who knows how the God in whose hand are all hearts may be dealing with this soul!" thought the pastor, as he accepted the courteous invitation. "O Thou, from whom alone comes wisdom, guide me so to speak, that a blessing may rest on my communion with one who may yet be led by Your judgments or Your mercies to walk in humility before You."

To the no small surprise of the household at the Castle, Mr. Eardley remained for two hours with the baronet in his study. Speculation was rife as to the cause of so unprecedented an occurrence. It was with a sense of relief that the servants heard at last the sound of Sir Digby's bell. Valance, eager to get rid of a dangerous visitor, answered the summons with unusual alacrity.

"Mr. Eardley will remain to dinner. Desire Mullins to have the carriage ready to take him home at night," was the command given to the astonished butler by his master.

"The carriage for him!" exclaimed every voice, after Valance had repeated the message in the servants' hall.

"If once the parson get a footing here, our game's up!" exclaimed Ford. "If I were Mullins I'd manage somehow to overturn the carriage by the way!"

## Chapter 27

### Disclosures

Very still was the chamber of sickness where one gentle watcher kept vigil beside a sufferer's bed. Marion had never fully recovered her senses since the terrible accident. A few words of distress sometimes escaped her unconscious lips, and every once in a while a deep groan burst from the sufferer's lips, but the room was usually so quiet that Rebekah could count every tick of the large clock on the stairs, and each stroke on its bell when it tolled midnight, sounded almost painfully loud.

Rebekah sat there by the light of the shaded lamp, silent, thoughtful, but not unhappy. The prevailing feeling in her soul was gratitude, deep and overflowing. What a mercy she deemed it that it was not her husband who lay stretched on a bed of pain, that Robert had not been a sacrifice to his own brave self-devotion.

But for him, the Castle had now been the scene of hopeless mourning—but for him, that poor crushed sufferer had never lived to repent. The God whom he had served had blessed him, had guarded his life in the hour of danger. When Rebekah reflected on what was—and on what might have been—the greatness of the peril and of the deliverance, her heart rose in

joyful thanksgiving, and she felt that she bravely could face every trial, since her husband was spared to her still. More hopefully now could she plead both for her father and her son, not forgetting in her prayers the poor girl whom she was so tenderly nursing.

Scarcely had the clock ceased to strike twelve, when the ear of Rebekah caught a creaking noise, caused by the opening of the nursery door, which was only separated from the room in which Marion lay by the breadth of the passage. The creaking was succeeded by a sound of low sobbing, as if from a child in distress.

Rebekah instantly glided to the door and unclosed it, and found Edith in the lighted passage, in night attire, with her tiny feet bare, and her dark hair hanging loosely on her shoulders. She was sobbing and trembling in the terrors of a child just awakening from nightmare. On the unexpected appearance of her teacher, the little girl rushed with a cry into her arms, and clung to her as if for protection.

“What is the matter, my child—my darling?” said Rebekah, raising the trembling Edith, and bearing her in her arms to Marion’s room. Edith clasped her round the neck tightly, and at first could scarcely gasp out between her sobs, “Don’t leave me—you won’t leave me—I’m so frightened—I dare not go back to my bed!”

“What has frightened you, dear lamb?” asked Rebekah, wrapping her own shawl closely round the little shivering form, and seating herself so as to prevent the child from seeing the pale bandaged face of Marion.

“It was that great dreadful knight and horse. They came clattering up the grand staircase, and I couldn’t run—I couldn’t get away, they were going to crush me to death!” the child’s eyes dilated with horror as she spoke.

“You have only been dreaming, dear Edith,” said Rebekah, who saw that the terrors of the day were, as might have been expected, blending with the visions of the night. “Let me carry you back to your bed.”

“Oh, no—no!” almost shrieked the child, “I am sure he will ride up there—oh, keep me—keep me beside you!”

“You need fear nothing, dear Edith,” said Rebekah, pressing the little girl to her heart, both to soothe her and to silence, for she feared that the voice of the child might disturb the sleeper. “The great statue lies where it fell. It cannot move—it never can hurt you.”

“Are you sure—quite sure?” gasped Edith.

“You may see for yourself,” whispered Rebekah.

Gently rising, she bore the child to the window, drew back the curtain, and pointed out to her the shapeless mass on the summit of the mound, dimly visible by the starlight.

Edith’s sobbing was lulled, her curiosity aroused. She gazed forth with an expression of wondering inquiry on her pale little face. Then said, “Is the beautiful Walhalla all down! I was there,” she continued, raising one small hand to her forehead, the other still rested on the neck of her teacher, “I was there when I heard the loud crack, and the plaster fell—I can’t remember anything else but a noise—oh, so dreadful, it seemed to burst my poor head! How did I get out?—how was I saved?—I can’t think how I was not killed.”

“My husband saw that the building was going to fall, so he rushed in and carried you out.”

“Was he not afraid?” exclaimed Edith.

The proud wife could not help giving utterance to the quotation which rose to her lips, “*The righteous is bold as a lion.*”

“Oh,” cried Edith with sudden animation, “won’t papa love him for saving his own little girl! He won’t send him away—you will never go away, you will stay in your dear little cottage.” Then, as another reflection dawned in her mind, in a subdued anxious voice the child asked, “And Marion—poor Marion—she was there. Oh, tell me, did your husband save her too?”

“Yes,” said Rebekah, glancing towards the bed, “we must not speak loud, or we may wake her.”

“Is she hurt?” whispered Edith. The answer seemed to come from the bed, there was a low moan, and then the murmured words, “Oh, Ford—Ford—you know that he never did it.”

Rebekah bent forward eagerly to listen. The child who had started at the first sound, now squeezed her hand tightly in silence, almost as intent as herself to catch the sentences uttered in delirium.

“Take the dog away,” cried Marion in shriller accents of distress, as she convulsively clutched the bedclothes. “Oh, his mother, have pity on his mother!”

To Rebekah’s surprise and annoyance, little Edith suddenly slipped down from her knee, and the prattle of her small feet on the floor, soft as it was, distressed the parent whose every other sense seemed to be absorbed in that of hearing. Rebekah rose impatiently to follow her, thinking that she was about to run up to the bed, but Edith turned to the door, which had been left slightly ajar, pushed it open, and hurried out into the passage. The cause of the child’s movements was soon apparent. Her quick ear had caught the sound of her father’s step on the stair, and with an instinctive perception that he too should hear what Marion was saying, the little girl had run out to bring him into the room.

“Edith, here—at midnight!” Mrs. Holdich heard the baronet’s exclamation of surprise and alarm.

“Come, papa, here—here—Marion is saying such strange things in her sleep.”

The next minute the tall form of the baronet darkened the doorway, Edith was grasping his hand.

“I’ll not go to the trial—no—no,” gasped out the sufferer, unconscious of all that was passing around. “I would let out all—I could not help speaking. Ford, you know that we saw the jockey clambering out of the window.”

“Ha!” cried Sir Digby, “here’s a clue!” and he strode straight up to the girl.

Probably his loud footstep startled her, for Marion suddenly opened her eyes with a terrified look of recognition. Edith was shocked at the sight of the ghastly face, swollen and bandaged, and now distorted with pain, for the movement which she made on waking sent a thrill of anguish through the poor girl’s frame.

“Where am I?” cried Marion, wildly, “Oh, tell me what has happened.”

“Ay, what has happened, wretched girl?” said the baronet, looking down sternly upon her. “I quit not this room till an answer is given. If there has been some foul plot against the son of the man who has saved your life at the risk of his own, if even in the smallest degree you

have been a party to that plot, I will have the truth—the whole truth from your lips, before I stir from this spot.”

“Oh, sir,” exclaimed Rebekah, “her fever runs high, in mercy do not question her now. Remember what injuries she has sustained.”

“Ay, and I am not likely to forget what injuries others have sustained,” said Sir Digby.

## Chapter 28

### The Day of Account

There was excitement, almost amounting to perturbation, in the servants' hall on the following morning. The baronet, though he had not left his study till past midnight, had, contrary to his usual custom, risen at an early hour, and sent for his steward Holdich. At the same time, he had given orders that his carriage should instantly be made ready to go to Axe. And while the wondering coachman, roused from sleep, was making his hasty preparations, Sir Digby wrote notes to Mr. Eardley and the magistrate, Mr. Grange, which the man was to deliver, and then bring both gentlemen with all speed to Castle Lestrangle.

“I'd have given my right hand to have broken them seals, and to have known what was in them letters,” said Valance, whose usually rubicund face wore an almost cadaverous hue. “I never saw Sir Digby look as he did when he gave them, there was something terribly keen and stern in the glance of his eye, he seemed to read one through and through.”

“Old Grange, the magistrate, what can he be sent for?” said Ford, “I don't like the look of the thing.”

“I daresay that the two are coming for nothing but to consult with Sir Digby about the Walhalla,” suggested one of the servants. “I carried in a note just now from the luckless fellow, little Slimes. He slunk off like a beaten cur when the building fell, and has been hiding himself in Axe, ashamed I suppose to show his face. Now he's wanting his boxes, or something of the sort, and Sir Digby, instead of answering his note, bade me tell Mullins to call for him too, and bring him back here directly. Sir Digby, when he has once taken a notion into his head, is not the man to let it go. Take my word for it, we'll have the Walhalla up again—knight—horse—and all the rest of it, before the summer is over.”

The frown on Ford's brow did not pass away, though Valance was ready to catch at the suggestion held out for his relief. “I guess that it's rather a question of pulling down than of building up,” the gardener muttered.

“Ha!” exclaimed Valance, looking through the window, “I'll be hanged if there is not that fellow Holdich coming here again, and that lad of his at his heels. There must be mischief brewing, or that young thief would not venture to come near the Castle. Do you think,” the butler lowered his tone, and glanced uneasily at Ford as he spoke—“do you think that any one can have dared to peach, that any rumor can have got wind?”

The carriage which had been sent to Axe was not very long in returning. The faces of those within it were eagerly scanned by the expectant servants, in the hope of reading there some solution of the perplexing question of why they had been summoned at so unusual an

hour. Mr. Grange, a short grave bald-headed man, stepped first from the carriage. No information could be gained from his quiet impassive demeanor. Mr. Eardley then sprang out, and with a light step went up to the entrance of the Castle. His expression was hopeful and bright, and from this an evil augury was drawn.

The face of Slimes exhibited conflicting emotions. His sallow countenance appeared even more sickly than usual, his black hair more lank and untrimmed. He had averted his face, almost with a shudder, from the mount of the Walhalla, when passing within sight of the ruins, and the pang of mortified pride had left its trace on his features when he alighted from the carriage. Nevertheless, the hopes of the architect were rising again. Easily cast down, but not easily kept down, inflated vanity rendered them buoyant. The fact of being summoned back to the Castle excited pleasant expectations. Slimes' fertile brain was already busily engaged in devising arguments to prove that the fall of the Walhalla was owing to a complexity of causes, none of them in the least connected with the miscalculation or want of foresight on the part of its gifted projector.

Mr. Slimes was given no time, however, to deliver the long explanatory speech which he had been composing during the drive, and which he had intended to spice with more than the usual amount of flattery. No sooner had Valance announced the three gentlemen in the grand saloon where Sir Digby was waiting with his daughter, than he received commands to summon all the servants, including Ford the gardener, into the presence of their master. The bloated face of the butler looked livid with fear, as he carried the portentous order to the rest of the household, who received it with more consternation than surprise.

"We'd one crash yesterday, there'll be another today!" exclaimed Bateman, who had been standing over the fire in deep confabulation with Ford. "I knew there was something a-coming when I saw Missie Edith this morning. I never knew a being so changed. Talk of shock to her nerves, stuff and nonsense! The child's brimming over with joy, but I can't get anything out of her. She puts her finger on her lips and says, 'Papa bade me not tell.'"

There appeared to be some difficulty in collecting the servants together, or there was some reluctance on their part to appearing before their master, for it was not until a loud authoritative ringing of his bell showed that he was growing impatient, that the crowd of domestics slowly made their way up the staircase and into the grand saloon.

Sir Digby, with his stately form drawn up to more than its usual height, was standing in the center of the room, with his little girl at his side, and a table near him on which various papers and writing materials were placed. At this table, Mr. Grange and the clergyman were seated. A little behind stood Holdich, grave and attentive, but betraying far less emotion than Rebekah and her fair-haired son, whose eyes, with an expression of intense anxiety and interest, were riveted upon the baronet.

In the recess of a window stood Mr. Slimes, his small figure half hidden by the heavy drapery of the curtain. There was an air of solemnity about the whole scene which increased the alarm of the conscious servants, and they clustered together in the doorway, unwilling to go further, till imperiously commanded to "come near."

"I have some few questions to ask," said the baronet in his awe-inspiring tone, as he sternly surveyed the group before him. "Most of you here present attended an examination

which took place last week, on the result of which might depend the character and future fortunes of a lad in my service and under my protection. Edward Holdich was accused of having been seized in the act of carrying away a jewel belonging to a guest residing under my roof. How was it that none of you, when put on your oaths, mentioned a fact which must have been patent to all, namely, that Edward Holdich was not the only, no, nor the *last* person seen clambering out the window of Mr. Slimes' room. That he was followed by an individual of the name of John Paton, who, without my consent or my knowledge, had been entertained in my servants' hall. That this individual"—Sir Digby spoke with a raised voice, laying stress upon every word—"was the one who discovered that the breast-pin was on the person of the boy, being doubtless perfectly able to account for the manner in which it came there. Answer me," continued the baronet, fixing his searching eye upon Valance, "how was it that none of the witnesses examined upon oath mentioned one word of all this?"

Valance made a convulsive effort to speak, but the words died away in his throat. Ford, who was bolder in evil, muttered out, "Who declares that such was the case?"

"You were not addressed," said the baronet, haughtily, "you will have questions to answer for yourself. You will have to account for an agreement made with a certain John Amery in Covent Garden."

Ford's sunburnt face flushed to a deep glow at the name, which was that of a well-known fruit-merchant in London. In fierce desperation he glanced at Holdich, who calmly answered his gaze.

"To return to our point," said the baronet, again addressing himself to the bewildered Valance, "I demand to know where is this said John Paton, who, though a principal actor in the affair, has hitherto been so carefully kept out of sight?"

"I don't know. I can't say—" stammered forth the miserable man.

"He must be found before the day of trial," said the baronet, sternly, "if things be as appearances denote, accused and accusers may well change places."

"There will be little difficulty in finding him," observed Mr. Grange, laying his hand upon a copy of the *Times* which had come by the post from London, "if, as we may conclude, this John Paton be identical with a jockey bearing that name, who has just been committed for trial on a serious charge of fraud."

This unexpected announcement entirely destroyed all remaining self-possession in the miserable Valance. The ideas of disgrace, ruin, accusation, conviction before the terrible bar of justice, confused and overwhelmed his mind. He made a desperate attempt to shift blame from himself by throwing it all on another. "Oh! sir, yes, Sir Digby, it was all his planning, all his doing, we meant nothing but a jest, a foolish bet, sir, there was nothing more serious, we only meant to make merry with the lad, but that Paton—"

"Are you mad?" muttered Ford, grasping his arm to stop him.

Mr. Eardley rose and came forward. "After what Mr. Slimes has just heard," he said, addressing himself to the architect, "I think it very possible that it may be his desire to drop altogether his prosecution of Edward Holdich, as, though it may be attended with serious consequences to the guilty, it cannot but also cause great inconvenience to the innocent."

Every eye was turned in the direction of Mr. Slimes, who came forth from the window recess with an air of nervous indecision. The baronet was the first to speak.

“Do you,” said he, “share my conviction that the whole charge against Edward Holdich has been trumped up in a base, unprincipled, detestable attempt to ruin an innocent boy?”

“I am most thoroughly convinced of it,” said Slimes. Edith darted a delighted glance at her teacher.

“And do you, under these circumstances,” asked Mr. Grange, who had been a keenly attentive observer, “desire to drop the prosecution?”

“I am most anxious to do so,” answered Slimes, to whom detention in the country would have been a serious evil, as Sir Digby had given him to understand that the Walhalla would not be rebuilt.

“Then I think that all can be satisfactorily arranged,” said the magistrate, “and that the character of Edward Holdich will remain without a shadow of suspicion upon it.”

Rebekah uttered a faint exclamation of thanksgiving, and then, by an irresistible impulse, clasped her son to her heart, and shed over him tears of delight. Holdich did not speak nor move, but his whole soul was prostrated in deep and fervent gratitude. Edith’s eyes were swimming in tears. Her sympathy in joy was as keen as once it had been in sorrow.

“All then may be deemed concluded,” observed Mr. Eardley.

“All is *not* concluded,” replied the baronet, and the confused miserable group before him read terrible meaning in his words. “The innocent has been cleared, the guilty must not altogether escape. This plot has been but one,” he pointed to some papers as he spoke—“one of a series of offences which have been too long overlooked. There is not a single individual of my household now before me, who has not been dishonest and false to his trust. The time of reckoning, long delayed, has arrived. I dismiss you all from this day month from my service.”

The effect of the announcement was startling. For a few moments none of the conscience-stricken servants dared to utter a word before their incensed and injured master. Then Mrs. Bateman burst forth with affected emotion.

“I’m sure and certain, sir, that you cannot mean to send me away from the dear darling child whom I’ve loved and cared for ever since she was born, and who—”

“No more!” said the baronet, with dignity, “never, till last night, did I know what my only daughter has had to endure from the neglect, nay, the tyranny of one to whom so precious a charge had been confided.” And to put an end to further remonstrance, the baronet, by an imperious gesture of the hand, dismissed the crowd of servants from his presence, silencing with a glance his little child, who, with the tender instinct of pity, was about to plead for her poor old nurse.

When the clatter of retreating footsteps was heard on the staircase as the discomfited servants retired, “I fear, sir,” said Mr. Grange to Sir Digby, “that so sweeping a measure of reform, however just, must expose you to great inconvenience.”

“I must necessarily have broken up my establishment,” replied Sir Digby, “for a visit to Italy has been prescribed for the health of my daughter, and I shall make immediate

preparations for my departure. Nay, Holdich, quit not the room, and let your wife and son also remain, I wish you to hear what relates to yourself. We shall probably remain abroad several years," he continued, addressing himself to the two gentlemen present, "and in the meantime I shall, with full confidence, leave my property under the charge of my faithful steward, Robert Holdich." The baronet did not think himself called upon to explain that the state of his affairs required his continental sojourn quite as much as the health of his child.

"And now," continued Sir Digby, with the air of one who, having settled a painful business, gladly turns to one more agreeable, "but one more duty remains. I see before me a man," his eye now rested on Robert Holdich, "who has not only served me with scrupulous fidelity under circumstances of difficulty, but to whose heroic courage I owe the life of my only child. Such a service is beyond all reward."

"It requires none, sir," said Holdich, for the first time appearing somewhat embarrassed, "I did nothing but what any other man should have done in my place."

"But what not one man in a thousand would have done," replied Sir Digby Lestrangle. "I cannot rest until I have at least made some acknowledgment of a service which can never be repaid. You have lately disposed of some timber on my estate. I desire that the proceeds, whatever they may be, may be placed to your own account."

"My father!" faintly ejaculated Rebekah, to whom this unexpected gift came indeed as a blessing from heaven.

"You cannot be aware, sir," said Holdich, frankly, "that your timber sold for eight hundred pounds."

Sir Digby had not known, had not guessed the amount. He could not refrain from a smile at the sudden rise in the value of his property since the old steward had been replaced by the new. He felt more assured than ever that his finances would soon recover from their state of depression, when his estate was left to the management of such a man as Holdich. The baronet's pride, even had a better feeling been wanting, would have prevented his taking advantage of the frank honesty of his steward to retract aught of his own munificent offer. Sir Digby, ere commencing his new course of retrenchment, felt satisfaction in performing one splendid act of generosity, worthy of a Lestrangle. It soothed his pride, it flattered his self-love, and to the astonishment of Holdich, who but the day before had nerved his soul for a life-long wrestle with poverty, the steward found himself the possessor of a sum which at once placed him and those whom he loved in a position of comfort and ease.

Holdich was, as we know, a man of few words, and never was he less able to express his feelings than at that moment of joy. Suddenly all the clouds had rolled from his sky—shame—persecution—poverty—grief—had vanished like dreams in the morning. They had left nothing behind but a grateful remembrance of perils past, and temptations overcome, and stronger faith, more rejoicing confidence in the wisdom and goodness of One who never faileth to deliver those who put their steadfast faith in His love.

## [Chapter 29](#)

### Children of Light

A cheerful, joyful party assembled in the cottage on the following day, to hear the concluding lecture on the history of Daniel, which was to be succeeded by others. None of the servants from the Castle were present, but several of the rustics came from neighboring hamlets, and farmer Sterne would not miss the opportunity. Heartily he congratulated Robert and Rebekah. "I knew that all would end well!" he exclaimed, "Slander may get the first start, but truth always wins in the long run!"

Ned rejoiced with a chastened joy, for he could not forget that his past sufferings had sprung, not from the malice of his enemies alone, but from his own weakness and wilful disobedience. With him regret for the past mingled with gratitude for the present.

"Why, if that ain't Sir Digby himself!" exclaimed farmer Sterne with surprise. "He's leading his child by the hand, blessings on her sweet, bright little face. You never did a better deed in your life, Holdich, than when you saved her from being buried alive under them ruins."

Sir Digby was indeed coming to grace the cottage of his steward a second time by his presence. His step was less proud, his glance less haughty. It may be hoped that the mortifications and cares of the last few days had not been without a salutary effect on his spirit. He had seen written in the dust of the Walhalla, in characters which he could not but read, the vanity of earthly pomp, the uncertainty of human enjoyment.

Edith, released from her irons, felt like a prisoner freed from his chain. To the buoyant spirit of childhood, the prospect of a visit to Italy, in the company of her father, opened a vista of almost unmingled delight. "Oh, how happy I should be!" she exclaimed, looking smilingly up into the face of Rebekah, "if only I could take you with me, and if"—here the smile passed away—"poor Marion was not so terribly ill."

"Marion is much better," said Rebekah, whose whole countenance now beamed with such happiness as she never before had known, "and till God please to restore her to health, you may be sure that I shall nurse her as carefully as if she were my own child."

"She does not deserve it from you," said Edith, "she did not mean to speak for your Ned, only when she was ill the words came without her knowing it. It was cruel and wicked in Marion to hide the truth so long."

No one felt this more keenly than the mother, but she only said in a gentle tone, "We must forgive and forget."

"Because you are the children of light," said Edith, "and the Lord bids them love their enemies, as He loved and died for His. Who knows," continued the child, as a bright thought broke on her mind, "who knows whether poor Marion, while she lies in pain on her bed, may not learn to be holy and good. Perhaps God has put her there to keep her from being tempted, and to give her time for thinking and praying. She used to say that she never had time. Perhaps God lets her be sorrowful now, to make her glad all the rest of her life."

"I hope so—I trust so," said Rebekah, "no one has more reason than myself to know that grief may be sent as a blessing, and that we have cause to thank God for every trial that leads us nearer to Him."

Mr. Eardley now entered the cottage with a heart more full of grateful joy than he ever had done before. Around him he beheld living examples of the power of grace to strengthen the soul in temptation, and support it under distress. And he adored the wisdom and love which

from age to age are bringing good out of evil, light out of darkness, and making the Babylon of this world the training place of the children of light.

### Lecture 7

It is not my purpose, in these simple cottage lectures, to enter upon the deep subject of the numerous prophecies contained in the Book of Daniel. I will not dwell on the wondrous visions seen by the holy Jew, foretelling the various kingdoms that should arise on the earth. Much of what he looked forward to in prophecy, we look back upon in history—the substance has appeared of which he beheld the shadow. I will but direct the thoughts of my hearers to two occasions on which the light from heaven shone with especial brightness upon the aged prophet, because what was revealed to him then is of the deepest importance to ourselves.

We read of the rise and fall of the empires of Persia, Greece, and Rome, as things in which we personally can have but little concern. But Daniel speaks of the Messiah, foretells the time of his coming, nay, looks beyond the long course of ages to the period when He shall come again in the clouds, and shall sit upon the throne of His glory to judge all the nations of the earth, we listen with interest deepened by awe. We hear of what we shall see. To us, as to the holy Daniel, the veil of the future is withdrawn. We also shall stand before the Lord in the vast innumerable throng whom He shall judge on the last great day.

High was the position of Daniel in the court of Darius the Mede. The minister was honored, feared, and obeyed, even by those who worshipped not the God whom he served. But it is not on the seat of judgment, nor in the council of state, that we now regard him. See Daniel as depicted yonder, in the seclusion of his own chamber, prostrate in sackcloth and ashes, pouring out his soul in fervent supplication for himself and his people. Most touching is the deep humility expressed in the prophet's prayer. He who dared the fierce wrath of Nebuchadnezzar, and shrank not from the den of lions, in the spirit of the lowly publican, made confession of sin before God—

“We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled. O Lord, righteousness belongs unto You, but unto us confusion of faces, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him. Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His law, which He set before us.”

Thus Daniel, one of the holiest men who ever trod this earth, rested *all* his hopes upon the pardoning mercy of God. With fervor yet more intense, thus the prophet concluded his earnest pleadings—

“Now, therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and cause Your face to shine upon Your sanctuary which is desolate, *for the Lord's sake*. O my God, incline Your ear, and hear. Open Your eyes and behold our desolation, and the city that is called by Your name. For we do not present our supplications before You for our righteousnesses, but for You great mercies. O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, hearken and do. Defer not, for You own sake, O my God. For Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

Let us mark, my beloved friends, that Daniel, in offering up his prayer, implored mercy of the Eternal Father *for the Lord's sake*. To Him must the Holy Ghost have revealed that in the name of the Savior, who was not to be born upon earth until several ages had passed, alone could forgiveness be asked from God. Daniel, like David before him, looked for salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophets of old, inspired by the Spirit, caught a glimpse of that truth to us so clearly made known, *There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*.

No faithful prayer is unanswered. That of Daniel drew down a visible angel from heaven. Gabriel, the blessed seraph, to whom in after-ages was given the honor of announcing to the Virgin Mary the coming birth of our Savior, was sent down from the presence of God with a message of peace to His prophet. "For thou art greatly beloved," said the angel. Oh, who can tell the rapture caused by an assurance of the love of the Eternal God for one of His feeble creatures, conveyed by the lips of a glorious seraph who had ministered before His throne!

Gabriel then spoke to the prophet of the times and seasons appointed by God *to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness*. He spoke to Daniel of *Messiah the Prince*, who should be *cut off, but not for Himself*. To the exile in Babylon was revealed the coming of Him who was to be *a light unto the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel*.

And this prophecy of the angel recorded by Daniel was not forgotten by the pious Jews when the time for its completion arrived. Simeon, just and devout, *was waiting for the consolation of Israel*. Anna, the prophetess, beholding the Babe, *spoke of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem*. If Micah foretold the place of our Lord's birth, to Daniel *the times and seasons* were revealed. Types and prophecies alike pointed out the son of Mary as the Savior of mankind.

I will refer to but one more vision which opened before the eyes of the aged prophet, who was permitted, like St. John, the exile in Patmos, to gaze on the coming glories of the Redeemer and Judge of the world. The subject is so lofty, so unspeakably solemn, that we must approach it with the deepest reverence and awe. What Daniel beheld in that rapturous vision, I will repeat in his own glowing words:

*"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow. His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. Thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened."*

Oh, most solemn of thoughts for each soul here present, "I shall be there on that day! Mine eyes shall behold the Eternal Judge seated on the throne of His glory! Shall I in that Judge find a Savior, whom not having seen I have loved. Whom I have sought, however feebly, to serve. In whom I have put my whole trust, and whose blood has washed out all my sins? When that countless multitude shall be divided, on the left hand the children of darkness, on the right hand the children of light, amongst which shall I then appear?"

"Oh, to be ready, ready for that day.

Who would not cast earth's dearest joys away?"

The words of the angel Gabriel contain a prophecy, a promise, a warning. May the spirit of truth impress them indelibly upon the hearts of all here present. *Many of them that sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever.*

The end

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