The Thorogood Family

By

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The Thorogood Family

Chapter One

This family was not only Thorogood but thorough-going. The father was a blacksmith, with five sons and one daughter, and he used to hammer truth into his children's heads with as much vigour as he was wont to hammer the tough iron on his anvil; but he did it kindly. He was not a growly-wowly, cross-grained man, like some fathers we know of—not he. His broad, hairy face was like a sun, and his eyes darted sunbeams wherever they turned. The faces of his five sons were just like his own, except in regard to roughness and hair. Tom, and Dick, and Harry, and Bob, and Jim, were their names. Jim was the baby. Their ages were equally separated. If you began with Jim, who was three, you had only to say—four, five, six, seven—Tom being seven.

These five boys were broad, and sturdy, like their father. Like him, also, they were fond of noise and hammering. They hammered the furniture of their father's cottage, until all of it that was weak was smashed, and all that was strong became dreadfully dinted. They also hammered each other's noses with their little fat fists, at times, but they soon grew too old and wise for that; they soon, also, left off hammering the heads of their sister's dolls, which was a favourite amusement in their earlier days.

The mention of dolls brings us to the sister. She was like her mother—little, soft, fair, and sweet-voiced; just as unlike her brothers in appearance as possible—except that she had their bright blue, blazing eyes. Her age was eight years.

It was, truly, a sight to behold this family sit down to supper of an evening. The blacksmith would come in and seize little Jim in his brawny arms, and toss him up to the very beams of the ceiling, after which he would take little Molly on his knee, and fondle her, while "Old Moll," as he sometimes called his wife, spread the cloth and loaded the table with good things.

A cat, a kitten, and a terrier, lived together in that smith's cottage on friendly terms. They romped with each other, and with the five boys, so that the noise used sometimes to be tremendous; but it was not an unpleasant noise, because there were no sounds of discontent or quarrelling in it. You see, the

blacksmith and his wife trained that family well. It is wonderful what an amount of noise one can stand when it is good-humoured noise.

Well, this blacksmith had a favourite maxim, which he was fond of impressing on his children. It was this— "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, doing it as if to the Lord, and not to men." We need hardly say that he found something like this maxim in the Bible—a grand channel through which wisdom flows to man.

Of course he had some trouble in teaching his little ones, just as other fathers have. One evening, when speaking about this favourite maxim, he was interrupted by a most awful yell under the table.

"Why, what ever is the matter with the cat?" said the blacksmith in surprise.

"It's on'y me, fadder," said little Jim; "I found hims tail, and I pulled it wid all my might!"

"Ah, Jim!" said Mrs Thorogood, laughing, as she placed a huge plate of crumpets on the table, "it's only when a thing is right we are to do it with our might. Pulling the cat's tail is wrong.

"'When a thing's wrong,
Let it alone.
When a thing's right,
Do it with might.'
"Come now, supper's ready."

"Capital poetry, Old Moll," shouted the blacksmith, as he drew in his chair, "but not quite so good as the supper. Now, then—silence."

A blessing was asked with clasped hands and shut eyes. Then there was a sudden opening of the eyes and a tendency in little hands to grasp at the crumpets, buttered-toast, bacon, and beans, but good training told. Self-restraint was obvious in every trembling fist and glancing eye. Only curly-haired little Jim found the smell too much for him. He was about to risk reputation and everything, when a glance from his father quelled the rebellious spirit.

“Come, Jim, fair-play. Let it go right round, like the sun,—beginning wi’ mother.”

Then silence reigned for a time—a profound silence—while upwards of two hundred teeth went to work. Ere long most of the children were buttered to the eyes, and their rosy cheeks glistened like ripe apples. Soon the blacksmith drew a long breath and paused. Looking round with a benign smile he asked little Jim how he got along.

“Fust rate,” said Jim.

“How I wish,” said Dick, with a sad look at the toast, “that we might go on eatin’ for ever.”

“Is it right, daddy,” asked Tom, during a pause, “to eat with all our might?”

“Certainly, my boy, till you’ve had enough. After that it’s wrong to eat at all. ‘Enough’s as good as a feast,’ you know. Now, Old Moll, one more cup to wash it all down, and then we’ll go in for a confabulation round the fire.”

Now, nothing rejoiced the hearts of that family so much as a confabulation round the fire on a winter night, or under the great elm in front of the forge on the village green in summer.

The table was cleared as if by magic, for every member of the family helped. Soon, little Jim was sleeping as sound as a top in his crib, and Mrs Thorogood, with her knitting, joined the others at the fire, by the light of which the blacksmith made a little boat for Harry with a gully knife and a piece of stick.

“It’s a stormy night,” said Mrs Thorogood, as a violent gust of wind came down the chimney and rattled the window-frames.

“Ah, it was on just such a night that, my dear old father and mother were burnt out of house and home,” said the blacksmith; “well do I mind about it, for I was over ten years old at the time. We never found out what it was that set the house alight, but when it had once caught, it fetched way like lightning—the wind was so high. The first thing that woke me was sneezin’ wi’ the smoke. Then, I’d just opened my eyes when I saw the head of a ladder come crash through the window. It was the fire-escape. Father tried to save mother, but he was lame, and fell down half-choked. I tried to help him, but I was too young.

Then a strapping fireman stepped in at the window, as cool as a cucumber, pitched us all into the escape, one after another; and so, through God's mercy, we were saved. I've loved the firemen ever since. They are the boys to show you how to do things well; to do things with might and main, and no fuss, and to submit to discipline without a word."

"Oh, father!" cried Harry with blazing eyes, "I should dearly like to be a fireman, an' go fightin' the flames."

"And Dick?" asked Mrs Thorogood, "wouldn't you like to be one, too?"

"No, mother. It's very grand, but I don't like smoke. I'd rather be a lifeboat-man, to fight wi' the storm, and save people from the roarin' waves."

Tom glanced at one of his toy ships, and said he'd like to fight the battles of his country on the sea. Bob looked affectionately at a wooden sword and gun which stood in a corner, and thought he'd prefer to fight his battles on the land.

"You're all for fighting, I see," chimed in soft-eyed Molly; "I wonder what little Jim would like to be, if he was awake."

"I know what battles I would like to see him fighting," said Mrs Thorogood.

"Why," exclaimed the blacksmith in surprise, "I thought you hated fighting of all kinds?"

"No, not all kinds. I should like to see little Jim fighting the battle of the Prince of Peace."

Of course there was a clamorous questioning as to what that meant, but we must not devote space to this subject. Neither can we afford to follow the history of each member of this family step by step. We will grow them up at once, and tell you what came of all their enthusiastic desires and lofty aspirations in succeeding chapters.

Only thus much will we say in conclusion; when the blacksmith said it was time to be off to bed that night, the children rose at once; gave and received a hearty kiss all round, and went off to "turn in," as sailors express it, "with a will." They had learned obedience—the most difficult lesson that man has got

to learn—the lesson which few learn thoroughly, and which our Lord sets us as a test of our loyalty to Himself, when He says says,— “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.”

Chapter Two.

It was what sailors call a “dirty night.” When you looked out upon the sea, it seemed as if there were nothing there but horrible darkness. If you went down to the beach, however,—close under the fishing village of Sunland—you found that there was just enough of light to make the darkness visible.

Tremendous waves came rolling madly into the bay, their white crests gleaming against the black sky until they came down like thunder on the sand. The wind roared and whistled over the bay, cutting off the foam-tops of the billows, and hurling them against the neighbouring cliffs. Mingled rain and hail filled the shrieking blast, and horrid uproar seemed to revel everywhere.

“God have mercy on those at sea,” was uttered by many a lip that night. It was a most suitable prayer! Some there were, doubtless, who uttered it with a little shudder as they turned in their beds, but said and did nothing more. Others there were, weak in body perhaps, but strong in spirit, who reflected, with some degree of comfort, that they had given of their gold to help those whose business it is to help the perishing. And there were others who had little gold to give, but who gladly gave their strong, stalwart bodies, and risked their precious lives to save the perishing.

Many of these last were on the beach at Sunland that night, with oilskin coats and caps, cowering in the lee of boats and rocks, or leaning against the furious gale as they tried to gaze out to sea through the blinding sleet and spray.

Among these fishermen were two young men—tall and strong—who seemed to despise shelter, and stood at the very edge of the raging sea. One was a black-bearded man of the Coastguard. The other, as his dress betokened, was a Jack-tar of the Royal Navy.

“There, she shows a light,” said the naval youth, as a flame, like that of a blazing tar-barrel, shot suddenly up against the dark sky and showed the rigging of a wreck, far out in the bay where the war of wind and waves was fiercest.

Scarcely had this light appeared when the Coastguardsman laid his hand on the young sailor’s shoulder and pointed towards the cliffs far away to the left of the bay. There a rocket had cut the heavens with a line of vivid fire. While they gazed, another sprang up into the sky.

“A vessel on the rocks!” said the Coastguardsman, (he had to shout in the other’s ear, so loud was the gale); “my duty lies there. Will you go with me, or stay to see the lifeboat start?”

“I’ll stick by the lifeboat,” shouted the man-of-war’s man, and they parted.

Ah! it was grand to see that lifeboat go into action. She could be easily seen, though the night was so dark, for she was painted pure white and bright blue, with a scarlet strip round her—a “thing of light,” but by no means a light thing! She was so large, and stout, and heavy, that she required a strong carriage on four wheels to transport her from her boat-house to the edge of the sea, which foamed, and hissed, and leaped up at her bow as if to taste the morsel which it hoped soon to swallow.

While the boat was yet on its carriage, her stout coxswain, or captain, clambered in.

“Now then, my jolly volunteers,” he shouted, “jump up, and on wi’ your life-belts.”

At that word our handsome young sailor laid his hands on the edge of the boat and vaulted into her as if he had been made of india-rubber. Ten more men followed his example, and quickly put on their belts.

“Nobody’s allowed to go off without a life-belt,” said the coxswain to the young sailor, “besides, it’s against rules to let you go.”

“How’s that?” asked the youth; “you called for volunteers.”

“Yes, but our volunteer-crew is already made up, so you must jump out. Thank you all the same, my fine fellow.”

The man-of-war’s man was too well disciplined to think of resistance, even for a moment. With a look of disappointment and an active bound, he leaped out upon the sand.

At that moment one of the men raised an oar, which was blown round by a sudden blast, and its end struck another of the crew on the temple, rendering him almost insensible. He had to be put out at once, and another volunteer

was called for. Like a flash of light, our youthful seaman again vaulted into the boat. His services were now accepted, and a cork life-belt was given to him, which he quickly put on.

Meanwhile crowds of men, and even some women and boys, stood ready at the launching-ropes. The word was given. There was a strong and a long pull altogether, and the lifeboat sprang into the sea as if it had been alive, with her crew seated and the oars out. A huge wave caught her bow and raised her up almost perpendicular. She seemed as if about to dance a reel upon her rudder. Our man-of-war's man had rode in many a wild sea, but never before had he seen the like of that. Nevertheless, he clung to his seat like a limpet, and pulled at his oar with all his might. The others were more accustomed to that special work. Just as she seemed about to topple over, the boat dropped forward and plunged out to sea. The next wave caught her in the same way, but with less power. Another stroke of the short, stout oars, and they had got fairly off into deep water.

Then did the heart of the young sailor beat wildly, for, besides rejoicing in that fierce struggle with the storm, he knew that his mission was one of mercy as well as danger. But how much more wildly did his heart beat when he reached the wreck, and, by the light of the blazing tar-barrel, beheld about twenty human beings—some of them women and children—clinging to the wreck, which was buried in foaming water by every sea.

One by one they were got into the lifeboat with great difficulty. Then the boat was pushed off and rowed towards the land. What a deep-toned shout there was on shore when her light form was dimly seen coming in on the crest of a great billow! And what a mighty cheer rang out when she drew closer, and the man at the bow-oar stood up and cried, "Thank God, all saved!"

Just then a monster wave fell on the stern of the boat and filled it. One little girl was swept overboard and went away with the backward rush of water, as the boat was hauled out of danger. Every one saw this, and a terrible cry went up, but only one man moved. Our young sailor sprang after the child. He knew that it was almost certain death to enter that surf without a rope, but a spirit of self-sacrifice—founded on the great example of Jesus—urged him on. He had no time to think—only to act. He caught the child and was dragged along with her into the wild sea. At that moment another Coastguardsman, who chanced to be a friend of the man-of-war's man, came upon the scene. Seeing what had occurred, he seized the end of a rope which some men had just brought down,

tied it round his waist, dashed into the sea, caught the sailor and the girl in the wide grasp of his strong arms—and then all three were hauled to the land in safety.

The poor child was nearly insensible, and had to be carried to a neighbouring cottage; and the young sailor staggered so from exhaustion that his friend and another man were obliged to support him as he went.

“Who is he?” inquired one of the fisherwomen, as she followed behind.

The Coastguardsman looked over his shoulder with a proud glance in his sparkling eye, and said aloud, “His name is Richard Thorogood.”

A statement which was received with three loud and ringing cheers.

Chapter Three.

But what of the wreck under the Sunland cliffs, which had sent up rocket-signals of distress on that same dismal night?

When our Coastguardsman with the black beard reached the scene, he found, as he had expected, that his comrades of the Coastguard had not been idle. They had brought down the famous rocket apparatus, with which so many lives are saved every year on our stormy shores.

The wreck was in a very different position from that in the bay. Instead of being far away from shore, among rolling billows that raged over the flat sands, this vessel, a brig, lay hard and fast among the rocks, not a hundred yards from the foot of the cliffs. Against these frowning cliffs the wild waves thundered as if they wished to beat them down. Failing in that, they fell back and seemed to go mad with disappointment; leaping, hissing, and whirling among the rocks on which the brig had been cast. The brig was so near, that the men on shore could see the forms of her crew as they clung to the rigging, frantically waving their arms and sending up shrieks of despair and loud cries for help. Truly there was urgent need for help, for the sea broke over the vessel so furiously that it was evident she must soon go to pieces.

There was only one little spot of partial shelter at the foot of the cliffs where man could stand on that fearful night. Here the men of the Coastguard had set up the rocket apparatus. The rocket was in position, and about to be fired, when our black-bearded Coastguardsman arrived. The light was applied. Suddenly the group of spray-washed men, and a few pale-faced spectators who had ventured to descend, and part of the overhanging cliffs, burst into intense light as the great rocket went out to sea with a wild roar. It was like a horrid fiery serpent, and carried a line tied to its tail! It plunged into the waves, and all was dark again, but there was no cheer from the wreck. The aim had not been good, and the rocket-line had missed its mark.

“Fetch another! look alive!” shouted our black-bearded friend, as he seized, set up, and aimed a second rocket.

Again the light burst forth, and the rocket sprang out in the teeth of the gale. It fell beyond the brig, and the line caught in the rigging! The wrecked crew seemed to understand what was required of them, for they immediately began to haul on the rocket-line. To the shore-end of it was fastened, by the men on

the rocks, a block or pulley with a double or endless line, called a “whip,” through it. When the men in the brig had hauled this block on board they fastened it to the stump of the main mast. Then the rescuers on shore tied a thick cable or hawser to their double line and ran it out to the wreck, but when this thick rope reached the crew, they did not seem to know what to do with it, for it was not hauled upon, but continued to hang loose.

“They must be foreigners, and don’t know what to do next,” said one.

“P’rhaps they’ve got too cold to work it,” said another. “I wish we had a little more light to see what they’re about.”

“We can’t afford to wait,” cried our friend Blackbeard, quickly throwing off his upper garments; “run me out, lads, on the whip. There won’t be much risk if you’re quick.”

“Risk!” exclaimed one of his comrades; “it will be certain death!”

But the daring Coastguardsman had already seized the thin line and plunged into the boiling surf.

His anxious comrades knew that delay would only make death more certain, so they hauled on the endless line as quickly as they could. Of course, being rove through the block before mentioned, the other half of it went out to the wreck with the gallant rescuer holding on. And what an awful swim that was! The line pulled him out, indeed, but it could not buoy him up. Neither could it save him from the jagged rocks that rose out of the sea every now and then, like black teeth which were quickly re-swallowed by each crashing wave. It was more like a dive than a swim, for the seething foam burst over him continually; but every time he rose above the surface to gasp for breath, he sent up a great shout to God for strength to enable him to save the perishing! Those loud prayers were drowned by the roaring tempest, but, though unheard by man, they did not fail to enter the ears of Him who rules in earth and Heaven.

Once the hero was thrown headlong on a rock, and so severely bruised that he lost hold of the rope, and when swept off again was left foundering in the foam. His comrades could barely see that something had happened to him, and a loud cry of consternation arose when they felt the line run light and slack. But our hero caught it again, and the cry was changed to a cheer as they ran him out to the vessel’s side.

He was soon on board, and saw at a glance what was the matter. The crew of the brig, being benumbed by long exposure, had not strength to tie the heavy cable round the mast. This the Coastguardsman did for them at once, and, as he did so, observed that there were two little girls among the crew. Then he gave a well-understood signal with a ship's lantern to the men on shore, who fastened a slung lifebuoy to their whip line, hung it by a block to the thick cable, and ran it quickly out to the wreck.

There was no time to lose now. Our hero seized the two little girls and put them into the bag which hung from the circular lifebuoy.

"Take care of my darlings," gasped the captain of the brig, who clung to the ship's side almost quite exhausted.

"Come, get into the buoy, and go ashore with 'em yourself," cried our hero.

"No. The three of us would be too heavy; send the steward. He's a light man and brave," replied the captain.

The steward was ordered to jump on the buoy and cling to it, so as to guard the little ones and prevent their being thrown out.

A signal having been again given with the lantern, the lifebuoy was drawn swiftly to land. It was a terrible passage, for the brig had begun to roll on her rocky bed, and at every roll the hawser and the lifebuoy dipped into the sea, or were jerked violently out of it, while the risk of being let drop on the black rocks that came grinning to the surface was very great.

But all went well. The three were received on the rocks with cheers, and conveyed up the cliffs to the Coastguard-house above, where warm welcome and shelter awaited them. The cheers were not heard by those in the wreck, but the re-appearance of the lifebuoy proved that the children had been saved, and a deep "Thanks be to God!" burst from their father's lips.

Still the captain refused to go, when urged. "No," he said, "let the men go first."

So, one by one, the men were safely hauled on shore.

"Now, captain, it's your turn at last," said our hero, approaching him.

He still hesitated. Then the stout Coastguardsman absolutely lifted him into the lifebuoy.

“No time for ceremony,” he said, with a smile, giving the signal with his lantern, “the brig’s going fast. Tell ’em to look sharp on shore, for I’m gettin’ used up with all this work.”

Away went the captain, and in a few minutes back came the lifebuoy. Not a moment too soon. Blackbeard sprang in as the mizzen-mast snapped with a report like a cannon, and went over the side. The next wave broke up the wreck itself. Before the lifebuoy had gained the shore it was plunged into the sea, out of which it no longer rose, the support of the wreck being gone. The men on shore now hauled on the rope with desperate energy, for a few minutes more would be sure to settle the question of life or death. Through the surging breakers and over the rugged rocks the lifebuoy was dragged, and a shout of relief arose when the gallant Coastguardsman was seen clinging to it. But he was insensible, and it was with difficulty that they loosened the grip of his powerful hands.

Then they bore him up the cliffs and laid him in his own bed, and looked anxiously upon his deadly white face as they covered him with blankets, applied hot bottles to his feet, and chafed his cold, stiff limbs.

At last there came a fluttering sigh, and the eyelids gently opened.

“Where am I?” he asked faintly.

A young man having the appearance of a clergyman, laid his hand gently on his shoulder.

“All right, Tom!” he said; “through the goodness of the Lord you’re saved, and fourteen souls along with you.”

“Thank God!” said Tom Thorogood fervently, and, as he said so, the tide of life once more coursed strongly through his veins, and brought back the colour to his manly face.

Chapter Four.

The great city was sound asleep. It was the deadest hour of the night, if we may apply that term to three o'clock in the morning, the hour at which most people have sought and found their pillows. Late revellers had ceased to shout and sing, early risers had yet a good hour of rest before them, if not more. Of course there were many wakeful sick folk—ah! how many in that mighty hive called London! But these did not disturb the profound quiet that had descended on the city: only a few weak but steady lights in windows here and there told of their existence.

Among the sleepless, on that calm dark night, there was one man to whom we draw attention. His bronzed cheeks and tall muscular frame told that he was not one of the wakeful sick, neither was he a sick-nurse, to judge from things around him. He sat with his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped, gazing into the fire and meditating—perhaps building castles in the flames. His eyebrows were very bushy and his looks stern, but there was a play of gentle, kindly feeling round his mouth. He was one of a gallant band of picked men whose duty it is to do battle with the flames, a member of the London Fire-brigade. Two other men like himself lay on two little iron beds sound asleep with their clothes on. There was this difference between them, however, that the wakeful man wore brass epaulettes on his shoulders. Brass helmets and axes hung round the room. A row of boots hung in a rack, a little telegraph instrument stood on a table near a map of London, and a small but sociable clock ticked on the wall.

That clock had quite a lively, cheerful tick. It seemed to talk to the fireman with the bushy brows until he smiled and looked at it.

"Tic—tic—tic!" said the man, "how low and gentle your voice seems to-night. Everything is so still and quiet, that you appear to be only whispering the flight of time."

"Tic—tic—tic," replied the clock.

But the fireman heard no more, for just then a faint, far-distant sound broke upon his ear. It drew near, like a rushing wind. Then like the noise of hurrying feet. The man rose and nudged one of the sleepers, who sat up and listened, after which he got up quickly, reached down his helmet, and awoke his companion, while the first fireman went to the station door. Some one ran

against it with fearful violence as he laid his hand on the lock, and the alarm-bell rang a tremendous peal as he threw it open.

“Fire!” yelled a man who seemed all eyes and hair.

“Just so; where is it?” replied the fireman, calmly glancing at the clock.

“Fire!” again yelled the man of eyes and hair, who was for the moment mad with excitement.

“You’ve said that twice; where is it?” said the fireman, seizing the man by his arm, while the two men, who had been asleep, slipped out like fleet but quiet ghosts. One called up the sleeping firemen, the other got out two horses which stood ready harnessed in their stalls.

The fireman’s grasp sobered the madman. A street was named. The outbreak of the fire was instantly telegraphed to head-quarters, and thence to other stations concerned. Round came the horses; in flowed the roused firemen, buttoning their garments as they ran each to his own peg for helmet and axe. At the same time two or three hauled out the steam fire-engine and yoked the horses. Three minutes from the first shout of fire had barely elapsed when the whip cracked, eight or ten helmeted men sprang to their seats, the steeds bounded away and tore along the no longer quiet streets, leaving a trail of sparks behind them.

Haste! haste! was the one idea. One minute saved may be a matter of life or death in cases of fire.

Constant training, stern drill, made every man act like a calm, cool, collected thunderbolt. No fuss, but tremendous energy. No noise, but now and then a deep bass roar when any vehicle chanced to get in the way, and a quiet smile when the danger was passed.

Thus they rushed along, like a fierce fiery monster, until they reached a square in the great city which was bright as with the sun at noon-day. A mansion was blazing from cellars to attics!

Our engine was soon at work. Other engines, whose stations lay nearer to the scene of action, were already pumping volumes of water into the flames. A strong force of police kept back the vast crowd, so as to let the firemen do their

work undisturbed. It was deadly work they had to do! Not only were flames spouting from every window, but masses of brickwork and blazing beams were falling in various places, rendering the service full of danger. A London crowd is usually well-behaved, but there are sometimes a few forward geese in it who think they can do things better than other people. One such, a huge man with a foreign accent, became excited, shouted, “Oh! vy don’t you put ’im hout?” broke through the crowd, and rushed among the firemen.

Our friend with the brass epaulettes and bushy eyebrows chanced to pass at the moment.

“Vy you not put more vatter on ’im?” shouted the foreigner.

The stern countenance of the fireman relaxed, and a humorous smile lit up his countenance for one instant; but he took no other notice of the foreigner, who was quickly collared by two policemen as strong as himself, and thrust back into the crowd, where he was received with laughter, and presented with much good advice. One little boy in particular recommended him seriously to go home and ask his mamma to put him to bed—a remark which was received with great delight by the bystanders.

But there was not much laughter; for the fire was very terrible, and there was a report that some of the inmates had not been rescued by the fire-escape men.

Meanwhile, our fireman with the epaulettes, who was foreman of that district, went about like a general in action, watching the flames sternly,—giving a quiet order to one, indicating a point of vantage to another, giving a helping hand here and there with the hose, answering a quick question promptly, and doing his utmost to dispose his force in such a way as to quell the raging fire. All this time he moved about among smoke and flames and falling materials as if he bore a charmed life—which, indeed, he did: for, as he afterwards said himself, the hand of God shielded him, and nothing on earth could kill him till his work on earth was done; and nothing on earth could save him when his time to die should come. This sentiment was, partly at least, the secret of the fireman’s cool courage in the midst of danger.

But the enemy was very strong that night, and the brigade could make no impression whatever on the burning house, the inside of which glowed like a smelting furnace.

“Try the drawing-room window, Jim, wi’ the fire-escape,” said our foreman to one of his men.

He helped Jim to push the huge ladder on wheels to the window mentioned, and placed it in position. While Jim ran for a nozzle and hose, there was a great cry from the crowd. A woman had got out on the ledge of an attic window, and knelt there shrieking and waving her arms, while the smoke curled round her, and the flames leapt up at her. She was high above the head of the escape; but there were fly-ladders which could be raised above that. These were instantly hoisted, and our foreman sprang up to the rescue.

The danger of the attempt lay in this—that, though the lower and upper parts of the escape were comparatively free from smoke, the middle was shrouded with a dense mass, through which now and then a lurid red flame burst. But our hero thought only of the woman. In a second or two he had disappeared in the smoke.

Two of the firemen stood below holding a nozzle of the hose and directing it on a particular spot. They did not dare to move from their post, but they could see by a glance upwards what was going on.

“Fred,” said one to the other in a low voice, “He’ll save her, or there’ll be a man less in the brigade to-night. He never does anything by halves. Whatever he undertakes he does well. Depend on’t, that Harry Thorogood will save that woman if she can be saved at all.”

As he spoke Harry was seen emerging above the smoke, but when he reached the top of the highest ladder he was fully six feet below the spot where the woman knelt.

“Come! girl, come!” he shouted, and held out his arms.

The terrified creature hesitated. She was afraid. She doubted the strength of the escape—the power of the man.

“Come! come!” again he shouted.

She obeyed, but came against the fireman with such force that the round of the ladder on which he stood gave way, and both were seen to go crashing downwards, while something like a mighty groan or cry rose from the multitude

below. It was changed, however, into a wild cheer when Harry was seen to have caught the head of the escape, and arrested his fall, with one powerful hand, while, with the other, he still grasped the woman.

“God favours them,” said a voice in the crowd, as a gust of wind for a few seconds drove smoke and flames aside.

Our bold fireman seized the opportunity, got the woman into the shoot, or canvas bag under the lowest ladder, and slid with her in safety to the ground.

The pen may describe, but it cannot convey a just idea of the thrilling cheers that greeted the rescued woman as she was received at the bottom of the escape, or the shouts of applause and congratulation that greeted Harry Thorogood as he emerged from the same, burnt, bleeding, scraped, scarred, and blackened, but not seriously injured, and with a pleasant smile upon his dirty face.

Chapter Five.

We turn now to a battlefield, but we won't affect to believe that the reader does not know who is one of the chief heroes of that field.

Robert Thorogood is his name. Bob does not look very heroic, however, when we introduce him, for he is sound asleep with his mouth open, his legs sprawling, his eyes tight shut, his bed the ground, his pillow the root of a tree, and his curtains the branches thereof. The only warlike point about Bob is the trumpet-sound that issues from his upturned nose.

Bob's sentiments about soldiering are queer. His comrades laugh at him a good deal about them, but they never scoff, for Bob is strong and full of fire; besides he is a pattern of promptitude and obedience, so they respect him. Moreover, he is a kindly and jovial man, therefore they are fond of him.

The battlefield of which we write was in the East. The fight had been between the British and Russians. The British had been victorious, and slept on the field.

When the bugles sounded the next morning they stopped the nasal trumpets everywhere, and Corporal Robert Thorogood was the first man of all the host to "fall in"—which he did by himself. But he was not long alone; others quickly joined him.

The companies were soon numbered, proved, formed into column, and marched off. Then there was a short halt for breakfast.

"Why, you're not half a soldier, Bob," said a hearty young comrade, while hastily eating his rations. "I saw you spare a Russian officer yesterday after he had cut off the little finger of your left hand."

"What good would it have done to have killed him?" asked Bob, with a smile, as he looked at the bloody stump, which had just been dressed by the surgeon; "the poor fellow's leg was broken by a bullet the moment after he had done it, so he could do us no more harm in this campaign. Then, his death would not make my little finger grow on again. Besides, I don't like killing men."

"Why did you join the army, then, if you did not do so for the honour and glory of fighting, (which means killing), our enemies?"

“Ah, you may ask that indeed! I mistook my profession, I suppose. However, I’ll do my duty while I remain in the service.”

As he spoke, firing was heard in the distance, and the men were ordered to fall in hastily before breakfast had been quite finished.

The firing increased, and soon the advance guard was seen falling back in good order over the brow of a small hill or slope. Rifle balls began to fly overhead, and a few to drop unpleasantly near the troops. Suddenly our Corporal was startled by an appalling cry behind him. He turned quickly, and saw the young soldier with whom he had been so recently conversing lying on his back stone dead, with the blood oozing from a hole between his eyes.

There was no time to think, however. His battalion was ordered to the front to defend a narrow rocky pass which the enemy were attempting to carry by storm. Twice already they had made the assault, and had almost succeeded on the second attempt. A third assault was being made when Thorogood’s company came up. They rushed forward just as the Russians crowned the heights and were driving the British back. The reinforcements checked them, but did not turn the scale at first.

There was one gigantic Russian who stood towering above his fellows with clubbed rifle, furiously knocking down all who came within his reach, like Horatius or one of the other heroes of ancient Rome. At him Corporal Thorogood sprang, grasping his rifle by the muzzle as he ran, and whirling it on high. The Russian saw him coming. The two rifles met with a crash, and flew into splinters. Bob dropped his weapon, grasped his adversary by the throat, thrust him back, and bore him headlong to the ground. This incident turned the scale. A cheer followed. The British swept forward with such irresistible fury that the men in front were thrust upon the foe in a mass, Bob and his enemy being turned heels over head in the rush. A well-sustained fire scattered the foe like chaff, and those who had been thrown down were taken prisoners. Among them was the gigantic Russian, with the Corporal still holding his collar tight in his iron grasp.

“Well done, my man!” said the Colonel of the regiment as he rode past Bob.

The Colonel was a man of few words. He said no more on that occasion, but every one knew that he would not forget the man who had so bravely turned the tide of battle that day.

Bob, however, did not escape altogether unhurt. He had been rather severely wounded, and afterwards had to spend a considerable time in hospital. As his wound did not prevent him from moving about, he soon became a valuable assistant to the surgeons and nurses in the hospital.

“Ah!” said he one night, when smoothing the pillow and attending to the wants of a severely wounded soldier, “this comes more natural to me. It suits me better than fighting.”

“I wish you were one of the regular nurses, Corporal,” said one of the surgeons heartily; “you do everything so thoroughly, and with such a will.”

But Bob was not allowed to remain long at his peaceful work. Being a healthy and temperate man he soon recovered, and ere long found himself in the trenches before Sebastopol.

It was winter. One bleak, raw morning, just before daybreak, Bob plodded down with his party through slush and mud to take his turn of fighting before the great fortress. It was bitterly cold and dark. Some of the men were grumbling terribly.

“Ah, then, won’t you shut your ’tatie traps?” said a big Irishman, who had won the Victoria Cross the week before for conspicuous gallantry.

“We engaged for this sort o’ work, lads, when we ’listed,” remarked Bob, “an’ are paid for it; so let’s stick to our bargain wi’ the Queen, an’ do our duty well.”

“Troth, that’s well said,” remarked the Irishman. “‘What’s worth doin’ at all is worth doin’ well,’ as my ould grandmother used to say when she whacked me.”

There was a faint laugh at this, and the grumbling ceased.

“Come, Corporal Free,” said Bob, “as we’ve got to sit here till morning you’d better tell us one of your far-famed stories to make the time pass pleasantly—at least as pleasantly as circumstances will allow.”

“Ay, Jacob Free,” cried the Irishman, “that’s well said. Give us that one about yoursilf whin ye was a schoolboy. A good story, you know, is niver a bit the worse o’ bein’ twice towld.”

“Hear! hear!” cried Bob, “come along now, Corporal, an’ give us the schoolboy’s story.”

Corporal Jacob Free, who was a gentlemanly man, somewhat advanced in years, said he would rather tell about some one else than himself, but this only made his comrades more determined.

“Well, then,” said he, at last, “since you will have it, I’ll give you what Bob Thorogood has named:— The Schoolboy’s Story.

“It was with an intense hatred of lessons and books that I began my school-days. Not an unusual experience, I believe, with boys. My parents were poor—though I have every reason to conclude that they were scrupulously honest; hence I began my school career rather late in life—at about twelve years of age. But previously to that, my much-loved, much-abused, and long-suffering mother had taught me to read and write, so that my brain was not altogether unfurnished when I went to school.

“It was a village school, in a remote district of Scotland; the master was a tall, thin, cadaverous and kindly man, of considerable attainments, and with a strong affection for boys. Had it been otherwise he must have died younger—of a broken heart. I loved that man—but I worried him. A pang of toothache-like remorse shoots through me still when I think of the sorrows I caused that good man, but the pang is mitigated by the reflection that I lived to make amends to him.

“I liked the school-days well enough at first; chiefly because I devoted myself entirely to play and refused work. Besides, there was something amusing in the novelty of the thing, and there was much interest in the mischief that could be done in school; also in the deeds of daring and violence that could be done out of it, with the able assistance of a score or so of boys of almost every age and size. But the liking moderated with experience, especially when the master, having tried every method of encouragement and persuasion in vain, adopted the trying method of keeping me in during play-hours. To escape this punishment I tried to learn a little.

“I was a bully when I went to school, being big and strong for my age. I mention the fact with shame, but it is some satisfaction to be able to add that I was not a bully when I left it. My chief enemy, and, afterwards, dearest friend, saved me from that state. He and I were the biggest and strongest boys in the school. His name was Tom Turner.

“In nearly all respects Turner and I were opposites. He was clever and studious; I stupid and idle. He was gentle and kind—especially to little boys; I rough and disobliging. He was usually dux, I invariably booby.

“‘You shouldn’t be so hard on little Spinks,’ he said to me in a quiet way, one day in the playground, ‘he can’t defend himself, you know.’

“‘You let me an’ little Spinks alone,’ I replied angrily, yet with some hesitation, for I did not feel quite sure that I could thrash Turner. I expected a sharp rejoinder, but he merely smiled and turned away.

“From that date I set Tom Turner down as a coward, and worried Spinks more than ever, just to spite him.

“One day I had been harder than usual on little Spinks, who was a mere human spider—all legs and arms, with a roundish body—when Tom called me aside and quietly began to lecture me, just as if he had been a grown-up man. I kept down my indignation at first, having made up my mind to have a quarrel with him, but the amiable tone of his voice subdued me.

“‘You should consider, Jacob,’ he went on, taking no notice of my flushed face and angry frown, ‘what a poor little squirrel of a thing Spinks is, and what a great powerful fellow you are. It’s not fair, you know, and he’s a kindly, harmless sort of a fellow too. Besides, if his poor mother knew how you treat him it would almost break her heart, for she’s very delicate, and he is her only child. You know I visited her last year, on my way from London, in passing the village where she lives. You’ve been there, haven’t you?’

“‘No,’ I replied sulkily.

“‘Oh, man, Jacob! you would enjoy a visit to Spinks’s home,’ returned Tom, still taking no notice of my state of mind, ‘it’s such a splendid place for trout-fishing, with a burn full of the deep oily pools you are so fond of, and lots of

sea-trout; and Mrs Spinks is so kind and jolly—though so delicate; just like little Spinks himself, but of course a good deal larger.'

"From this point Turner went on to describe his visit in such a cheery way, that I was forced into a better state of mind, though I did not forgive him for lecturing me.

"It chanced that I received a lecture also, the same evening, from our master.

"'Jacob, my boy,' he said, laying his large hand gently on my head, 'you ought to give more attention to your studies, and try to be a better boy. You've got the elements of a smart man in you, but a man must be made, Jacob. If a lad grows up without any self-training he is generally fit for nothing, and only a trouble to society. You're fond of your mother, I think—are you not?'

"'Yes, sir,' said I, in some surprise at the question.

"'Then you would be sorry to give her pain, I know, and your present course of conduct is sure to do that if you don't mend. You would be sorry to see your mother take handfuls of her small income and fling it into the sea, would you not?'

"'Of course I would, sir,' said I, still more surprised.

"'Well, you have caused her to do that, for your school fees might as well have been flung away for all the good you have done hitherto. But come, I'll say no more just now. I feel sure you will try to do better. You have only got to try, asking God to help you, and you're certain to succeed. I expect to be proud of you yet, Jacob. There, be off and play.'

"I was somewhat touched by this brief reproof, but not humbled. The lecturing tone assumed by Turner still rankled, and a feeling that I deserved severer treatment than I received, made me worse. I resolved to harden my heart; and from that date became more mischievous and domineering as well as idle—if possible. I saw that the master was grieved, but did not care.

"One day in autumn, some of us were sitting on a rail swinging our legs and chatting. Turner was not there, but little Spinks was.

"'I tell you what,' said I, referring to a remark made by one of the boys, 'I think it is not only contemptible to try to learn one's lessons, but ridiculous.'

"'I'd rather learn them than get whacked,' said one.

"'Well, I would rather get whacked than learn them,' said I; 'besides, of what earthly use are Latin and Greek, I should like to know?'

"'Fellows can't get along in the learned professions without them,' said a boy whom we named Tiddler. He was a follower of Turner, and usually kept pretty near him in the class.

"'Very true,' said I, with a look of mock respect; 'but as none of us intend to enter the learned professions except Doctor Tiddler and Professor Turner, we don't want Latin or Greek; what we want is fun.'

"'Hear! hear!' burst from Spinks, who was an impressionable little fellow, and easily influenced for good or evil. His exclamation was so genuine and heartfelt that there was a general laugh, and one of the boys suggested that, as little Spinks did not mean to go in for any of the learned professions, they should elect him 'Professor of Fun.' This was unanimously agreed to.

"'But, come,' said I, jumping down, 'we must not spend all the evening here idling. What shall we do?'

"'Go an' study Greek,' said the newly-elected Professor of Fun; a suggestion which was received with a shout of derisive laughter.

"'I should like to have some of old Maggie's apples for supper,' said I.

"'But who's to crib them?' asked a large-headed boy, whose appearance reminded one of a tadpole.

"'Little Spinks, of course,' said I. 'Come, be off—and be sure that you take good ones. I'll follow, and watch to see that no mischief happens to you.'

"'It's a shame to rob the poor old woman,' said Tiddler. 'I'll have nothing to do with it. I'm sure that Tom Turner would object if he were here.'

"'Oh! you needn't come if you're afraid,' said I, with a sneer; 'and if there are any other cowardly Turnerites here, they may join you. Whoever has got pluck will follow the Frees. Lead on, Spinks!'

"The greater number of the boys followed me; and from that date the school was divided into two sections—Turnerites and Frees.

"We went straight to the back wall of old Maggie's garden, and I helped little Spinks over, desiring him to gather a capful and fetch them, and then he could return for more if thought desirable.

"My enemy Turner was fond of old Maggie, and frequently went to see her and have a chat. It chanced that he was visiting her on the evening we had decided to steal her apples. While sitting beside her, listening as earnestly to a prolonged and graphic account of the old woman's troubles as if he had been the minister of the parish, he chanced to look out of the window, and saw a boy descending one of the apple-trees. One of old Maggie's troubles was the stealing of her apples by village boys. She had dilated extensively on the subject and aroused her friend's anger. With a burst of indignation, he rushed out, and caught little Spinks in the act of making off with his second capful of apples.

"'What! Spinks? I should not have expected this of you,' said Tom, releasing my little victim.

"'I didn't want to do it,' whimpered Spinks; 'but I couldn't help it. I—'

"'Yes, yes; I understand. Who was it that set you on?'

"'Please, I don't want to tell.'

"I am convinced that brave little Spinks would have refused to tell to the end of the chapter, but I saved him further trouble. Wondering, as I stood behind the wall, what kept him so long, I shouted, 'Come along, Spinks; look sharp!'

"'Oh! I know now who did it,' said Turner. 'Go, my boy. I'll relieve you of the apples.'

"So saying, he carried the apples to the owner, and Spinks came and told me what had occurred.

"'I'll thrash Tom Turner for this,' I said bitterly, as we returned to the school.

"For some time past I had made up my mind to fight him. On several occasions I had proved myself to be possessed of a little more bodily strength than Tom; and as regarded endurance and pluck, I felt quite at ease on these points.

"Opportunity soon offered. One day I was up a tree, bird-nesting, in one of the lanes near our school. I had flung down my books at the foot of the tree before climbing it. Just as I laid hands on the nest, in which there were four eggs, I heard voices below, and looking down, observed Turner, Tiddler, and Tadpole passing.

"'I wonder what careless fellow has flung down his books in that fashion,' said Tom.

"'I am the careless fellow!' I shouted. At the same time I flung the nest straight into his upturned face. The result was better than I had expected; for it hit him fair, and the four eggs, bursting on his forehead, poured over his eyes and nose.

"This was received with a shout of laughter by the other boys. I leaped to the ground, strode up to Tom with doubled fists, and asked if he would fight me.

"'Not if I can help it,' said Tom, quietly wiping his face.

"Amazed at his forbearance I scarce knew how to act. At last I said, sneeringly, 'I never quite believed you to be a coward until to-day.'

"'Whether I'm a coward or not is, perhaps, doubtful; but I came under a promise not to quarrel with you if I could avoid it, and you see, Jacob, I'm trying to keep my promise, though it's not easy.'

"'Perhaps that will make it less easy,' I said, suddenly fetching him what was meant to be a slap in the face; but by a prompt withdrawal of his head he let my hand pass. Instantly I fetched him another slap with the left hand, but he caught my wrist, and stopped it.

"'Come, Jacob,' said he, in a rather stern voice, 'I will fight you, but it must be done in the regular way, on the green.'

“Satisfied with this, I left him, to prepare for the encounter.

“The green was a level piece of turf close to school, beside a stream, which, at that place, was formed into a deep pool by means of a mill-dam. We had named the pool the black hole. It was the scene of all our school fights. In class that day I was unusually quiet, for I could not help thinking of the impending fight. I felt that it would be a hard one, though I never for a moment doubted the result. To keep my mind off the subject I applied myself to my lessons, and acquitted myself in a way that gratified the master and amazed the boys.

“The fight was to come off after school hours. The boys assembled with high expectations, something unusually ‘stiff’ being anticipated, and they were not disappointed.

“I was on the ground with my friends and backers before my adversary appeared.

“‘Don’t make too much of a burst at first,’ said one boy; ‘play with him till you see what he’s made of.’

“‘I’d advise you to go in for sloggin’,’ said another.

“‘Yes, knock the wind out of him at once,’ said Tadpole; ‘he’s an English fellow, you know, and may bother you with science.’

“As he spoke Tom appeared. He walked smartly towards me, with his usual pleasant smile on his face, and held out his hand.

“‘Come, Jacob,’ he said, ‘shake hands, and let us give up this affair. Why should we fight? I am quite willing to admit that you are cock of the school, and have no desire to give or receive black eyes. Besides, you injured me more than I injured you, so that you’ve no occasion to bear malice.’

“‘You called me a careless fellow,’ said I, hardening myself, and looking fierce.

“‘Well; but I did not know at the time that you were the owner of the books.’

“‘No matter, you came here to fight, and so did I. Don’t let us waste more words.’

"'Truly he suffereth long,' cried one of the boys, with a sneer and a laugh, quoting from the Bible, which, it was well known, Tom Turner read daily.

"'I am taught,' said Tom, turning gravely to the last speaker, 'as far as lies in me, to live peaceably with all men. I have tried to do this, and find it impossible to live peaceably with Jacob Free—therefore—'

"He stopped, pulled off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and threw himself into the pugilistic attitude.

"We did not trouble ourselves about ceremony in that school. We had neither seconds, bottles, nor sponges. I went at him at once, and, remembering the advice of Tadpole, made a tremendous blow at his face. Tom scarcely moved a muscle; he merely put his head a little to one side and let the blow pass. Like lightning I delivered my left. Tom let it pass in the same way. Surprised and maddened I sent in another blow, lunging to my full extent. He merely drew back from the waist and the blow fell short. At the same moment I received a tap on the bridge of my nose which raised a host of stars in my imagination. In short, I found myself at the mercy of a well-trained boxer. Perceiving this I grew desperate, and sprang at my adversary with the intention of grappling him, but he stepped lightly to one side and I shot past him. This would have been a trifling matter had we not edged rather near to the river. In my blind rage I went head-foremost into the deep pool, already mentioned as the black hole. I could not swim. I rose with a gurgling cry and sank again. Turner knew that I was drowning. He was a splendid swimmer, and instantly sprang in and caught me, but I seized him round the neck and dragged him under, while the boys shouted in consternation on the bank.

"Their cries soon brought assistance, but, ere it arrived, we had been sucked within the influence of the dam where the stream went under the sluice with great violence. As we struck against the sluice I caught it. Turner held on to me, but was dragged partially under. Another moment and two powerful countrymen had hold of me, and pulled me out. They had more difficulty with Turner. His right leg had got entangled, and, in dragging him forcibly out, they broke it.

"This event was the great turning-point in my schoolboy life. Remorse began to tell upon me while they carried him home, but words cannot describe the agony of my mind when, a fortnight afterwards, I was admitted to his room and

saw him lying, a mere wreck of his former self, but with the old kindly smile on his face, as he stretched out his thin hand.

"'We'll be friends now, Jacob, won't we?' he said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I could not speak. The thought that I had brought him to this in spite of his desire to be friendly, overwhelmed me. I could only seize his hand, bury my face in the bed-clothes, and sob.

"'Never mind, Jacob,' he said cheerily; 'I shall be all right soon, and then we shall have the fight out—a little further from the black hole!'

"But Tom Turner did not get all right soon. He became worse and worse. The wetting and the accident combined to throw him into a fever, which left him to all appearance a confirmed invalid and a cripple, so that he was obliged to give up all idea of returning to school.

"'I would not mind it so much,' he said to me, some months afterwards, with a feeble effort to be cheery, 'if it had not stopped my going to school. You see, I had set my heart on being a learned man, and one has not much chance of being that without a teacher. But God's will be done. I don't grumble, Jacob, though I can't help wishing very hard that it had been otherwise.'

"I formed a great resolve while he was speaking, but said no word about it. I determined to apply myself, heart and soul, to study, until I should not only reach but pass the point where Tom had left off, and then I would become his teacher, carrying him on, step by step, as I advanced!

"To make a long story short—I carried out my resolution. It was harder work than I had expected, but I persevered. My love for Turner had become intense. I felt like a high-pressure engine with extra steam on and the safety-valve screwed down. The amazement of the boys at the change in me may be imagined. The satisfaction of the master cannot be imagined. I took no notice of either condition, but held on my way. Soon I came up to Tom in learning; then shot past him; then revealed my designs and took him in tow.

"Tom was charmed with the plan and inexpressibly grateful. When little Spinks came to hear of it, he begged to be allowed to study along with us in the sick-room. We agreed to this. Then Dr Tiddler was admitted, and afterwards the Tadpole; so that our evening class flourished.

“But the best of it was, that Tom did not become a confirmed invalid. A new doctor, who came to live in our village, seemed to understand his case better than the old one. At all events he effected an almost perfect cure, so that Tom’s limp became scarcely perceptible, and his general strength was so much restored, that he and I afterwards had many long geological and botanical rambles over the surrounding country, in company with little Spinks and the rest of the evening class.

“And this was no mere flash in the pan. We persevered to the end. From the date of that fight all the boys became Turnerites, our village school commenced a prosperous career, and our kind old master had the satisfaction of living to see it grow into one of the most noted in the district for turning out well-educated boys.

“Finally: Tom Turner became a real ‘Professor’—a Professor of Theology. And Tiddler became a real doctor of medicine. The Tadpole also came off with flying colours. His body grew up to his head, insomuch that he became a fine strapping fellow, and a Professor of Natural History in one of our colonial colleges. I am the only one of the lot who did not get on well in life, and that, lads, was owing to drink. In a drunken spree I enlisted, and here I am now, only a corporal; but, thank God, I’m also a total abstainer, and hope to remain so to the end of my life.”

Most of the men in the trenches had become rather sleepy while listening to Jacob Free’s story, but they began to freshen up a little when the first faint streaks of dawn appeared, for they knew full well that the enemy would be stirring ere long. And they were right.

When day broke the Russians commenced firing, and every now and then a shell would pass roaring over the men’s heads. Sometimes one would drop in amongst them. When this happened the men fled right and left, or threw themselves flat on their faces until the shell had exploded.

On one of these occasions a shell dropped close to a wounded man, to whom Bob was giving a drink at the time. The men near it sprang away or lay down as usual, but the wounded man lay in such a position, with his shoulders raised by a little knoll of earth, that he could not escape, and had not strength even to move. With a look of horror he gazed at the hissing shell. Bob Thorogood saw this all at a glance. In a moment he had the live shell in his arms, rushed to the top of the earthworks, and hurled it over, only just in time,

for it burst as it reached the ground, and blew the spot on which Bob stood, with Bob himself, back into the trenches, where the big Irishman received him in his arms.

“Not hurt, darlin’, are ye?” he asked anxiously.

“No, thank God, only shaken a bit,” answered the Corporal.

Next day, however, our hero was not so fortunate, although he gained a reward for which many of his comrades panted.

He was on duty at the time in the trenches. The Russians had been pretty quiet that night, but just before daybreak they made a sortie in considerable force. Our Corporal’s company had to bear the brunt of the fighting, and suffered much. It was broad daylight before the Russians were driven back. Some of the more fiery men of the company pursued them too far, and were cut off. At last all the survivors returned to the trenches, and then the enemy commenced a furious cannonade, as if to revenge themselves for the repulse. Their sharpshooters, too, were on the alert, and if a man chanced to show the top of his shako above the earthworks, several bullets went through it instantly.

Among those who had fallen on the exposed ground outside was a young officer—almost a boy, with fair curling hair and a soft little moustache.

He lay severely wounded under the frail protection of a bush round which shot and shell were raining fearfully. Corporal Thorogood observed him, leaped over the earthworks, ran through the iron storm, raised the youth in his strong arms, and brought him under cover in safety. The Corporal’s shako was riddled, and his clothes were torn in all directions, but nothing had touched his body save one bullet, which cut off the forefinger of his right hand.

For this gallant deed Corporal Robert Thorogood afterwards received the Victoria Cross. What pleased him far more, however, was the fact that the young officer’s life was saved, and he ultimately recovered from his wounds.

“Ah, then,” said the big Irishman, with a look of pity when Bob showed him his bleeding hand, “your sodgerin’ days is over, me boy.”

And so they were. At the close of the war our Corporal retired from the service with a small pension, leaving two fingers behind him!

Chapter Six.

One very cold but calm and clear winter night, a lame man was seen to hurry along the Strand in the direction of Saint Paul's Cathedral. The man was clothed in a thick greatcoat, and wore a shawl round his neck, which muffled him up to the very eyes. Indeed, the said shawl would have gone quite over his eyes if it had not been for his fine Roman nose, which stuck out over it, and held it firmly down.

The man's lameness was only a limp. It did not prevent him from walking very fast indeed. He was evidently bent on business; nevertheless, the business was not so pressing but that he could stop now and then to look at anything that interested him in the crowded streets.

And how crowded they were—and cheerful too: for it was Christmastide, and people seemed to be more excited and hearty than usual. The shops were resplendent—filled to overflowing with everything that could tempt man to spend money, and blazing with gas-light, so that the streets seemed even brighter than at noon. The poulterers' shops, in particular, were so stuffed, that rows of fat geese and ducks, apparently finding the crush too much for them inside, seemed to have come outside the shops and hung themselves up round the doors and windows!

The lame man did not linger long, however, but hurried onwards until he reached that quarter of the city near to the Bank of England, where very poor and wretched people lived upon wondrously little of that gold which lay in such huge quantities so near them.

In the back slums of this region there were no bright gas-lights. The shops were ill-lighted and miserable, like the population, except a few at the corners of streets, where rough men and ragged women, and even children, went to poison themselves with gin.

In one of the darkest and dirtiest of these streets the lame man found an open door and entered, taking off his greatcoat and shawl, which he handed to a pleasant-faced man who stood there.

"I'm in good time, I hope?" said the lame man.

"Oh yes, they're on'y 'alf through their tea yet. Miss Home's bin singin' to 'em."

The lame man's body was very thin and not very strong, but his face was particularly handsome and grave, with a strange mingling of humour and sadness in his expression.

Opening an inner door, he entered a large schoolroom, and, going to the upper end of it, took his place behind some gentlemen, who nodded to him as he passed.

The room was filled with the very lowest classes of the London poor. Among them were ferocious-looking, dirty, ragged men, who might have been thieves, burglars, or pickpockets. Not less disreputable-looking were the women and children. The air of the room smelt horribly of dirty clothes and drink. They were all very quiet, however, and well-behaved at the time, for all were busily engaged in eating splendid "hunks" of bread and cheese, and drinking huge mugsful of hot tea. Truly there are few quieters of the savage human breast equal to food! Probably all the people there were hungry; many of them had been starving, and were ravenous. There was scarcely any sound except of moving jaws, when, accompanied by a few chords from a harmonium, a sweet, mellow, female voice told of the love of Jesus Christ to poor, perishing, guilty man.

Both the words and music of the hymn had a soothing influence on the people. When the calm contentment resulting from satisfied hunger had settled down on them, a gentleman rose, and, continuing the theme of the hymn, told his hearers earnestly about the Saviour of sinners. His address was very short, because, he said, a city missionary—a personal friend—had come that night to speak to them. As he said this, he turned to the lame man, who rose at once and stood forward.

There was something in the gaze of this man's piercing yet tender eyes which forced the attention of even the most careless among them. His handsome young face was very pale, and his lips were for a moment compressed, as if he were trying to keep back the words which were ready to rush out. When he spoke, the soft tones of a deep bass voice helped to secure attention, so that you could have heard a pin drop.

At once the lame man launched into a most thrilling description of a scene of peril and rescue. He told of a gallant ship battling with a furious gale: of her striking on a shoal: of the masts going over the side: of wreck and ruin all

around, and the wild waves bursting over passengers and crew, and gradually breaking up the ship— “No hope—no hope—only cries for mercy—shrieks of despair!”

As the lame man spoke, his eyes seemed to flash. His cheeks were no longer pale. The rough men before him frowned and gazed as if their anxiety had been roused. The women leaned forward with eager looks of sympathy. Even the children were spellbound. One hulking fellow, with a broken nose and a black eye, sat clutching both knees with his muscular hands, and gazed open-mouthed and motionless at the speaker, who went on to say that when things were at their worst, and death stared the perishing people in the face, a beautiful object seemed suddenly to rise out of the raging sea; its colour was a mixture of pure white and bright blue!

It was the lifeboat, which sheered alongside and took them on board one by one.

“Some there were,” said the lame man impressively, “who hung back, and some who at first did not believe in the lifeboat, and refused to leave the doomed ship. There was no hope for those who refused—none whatever; but they gave in at last. God put it into their hearts to trust the lifeboat, and so the whole were rescued and brought in safety to the land.”

“Well done!” burst from the hulking man with the broken nose, and a deep sigh of relief escaped from many of the women; but there was instant silence again, for the speaker’s hand was up, his eyes were glittering, and his lips compressed. Every one knew that more was coming, and they bent forward.

Then, in a low soft voice, he began to tell of a dark but quiet night, and a slumbering city; of a little spark, which like sin in a child, was scarcely visible at first, but soon grew fierce and spread, until it burst out in all the fury of an unquenchable fire. He told of the alarm, the shouts of “Fire!” the rushing to the rescue, and the arrival of the engines and the fire-escape. Then he described the horror of a young woman in the burning house, who, awaking almost too late, found herself on the very edge of destruction, with the black smoke circling round and the impassable gulf of flame below. Just then the head of the fire-escape approached her, and a man with extended arms was seen a few feet below her, calling out, “Come!”

Like some of those in the shipwreck, she did not at first believe in the fire-escape. She could not trust. She would not leap. While in that condition there was no hope for her, but God put it into her heart to trust. She leaped, and was saved!

The speaker stopped. Again there was a sigh of relief and a tendency to cheer on the part of the hulking man, but once more the sparkling eyes and compressed lips riveted the people and tied their tongues. In another moment the missionary had them on a battlefield, which he described with thrilling power, passing rapidly from the first bugle call through all the fight, until the foe was finally put to flight amid the shouts of "Victory!"

"Men and women," he said in conclusion, "I am painting no fancy pictures. The things I have told to you did really happen, and four dear brothers of my own were chief actors in the scenes described. They helped to rescue the perishing from the sea and from the fire, and joined in the shout of Victory! on the battlefield. Now, friends, you are in a worse case than any I have yet described. The tempest of sin is roaring round and in you. This world is sinking beneath you, but Jesus Christ, our Lifeboat, is alongside. Will you come? The fire is burning under your very feet; there is no deliverance from the flames of God's wrath, except by the Great Escape. Jesus is at hand to save. Will you come? The battle is raging. Don't you know it? Do you forget that awful combat with the tempter when you fought your way past the gin-shop, but were beaten and turned back? Or that terrible assault, when passion after a deadly struggle laid you helpless on your back? Oh! may God's Holy Spirit open your eyes to see Jesus—the Captain of your Salvation—at your elbow this moment, waiting at the door of your heart and knocking till you will open and let Him in to lead you on to—Victory!"

Here the speaker dropped his voice again, and spoke tenderly of the love of Jesus to the chief of sinners, and as he spoke, tears were seen trickling down many a dirty face, and sobs broke the solemn stillness.

As the lame man was going home that night, a young girl ran after him and seized his arm. Her eyes were swollen with weeping.

"Oh, sir," she cried in a low voice that trembled with emotion, "can—will—Jesus save the like of me?"

“Assuredly, my poor girl. He says ‘Come unto me,’ and ‘Whosoever will,’ let him come. If you are willing, there is no doubt about His willingness. The difficulty only lies with you, not with Him. Where do you live?”

“I have no home,” sobbed the girl; “I have run away from my home, and have no place to lay my head in here. But oh! sir, I want to be saved!”

The lame man looked with the deepest commiseration into the appealing eyes. “Come,” he said, “walk with me. I will tell you of One who had no place where to lay His head.”

She took his arm without a word, and the two hurried through the still crowded streets. Arrived at his own door, the lame man knocked. It was opened by a fair, soft, and exceedingly pretty little woman of about thirty years of age, whose fresh face was the very personification of goodness.

“Why, Jim!” she exclaimed, looking at the girl in surprise.

“Here we are, Molly,” exclaimed the lame man, bustling into a snug room in which a fire was blazing, and cheering preparations for tea were going on, “and I’ve brought a friend to spend the night with us. There’s plenty of room on your floor for a shake-down, eh? This is my sister,” he added turning to the girl, “Mary Thorogood, but we always call her Molly. She has come to visit me this Christmas—much against her will, I believe, she’s so fond of the old folk at home. Come now, take her into your room, Molly; make her comfortable, and then we’ll have tea.”

Molly took the girl into her room. Returning a moment later for something forgotten, she was touched on the shoulder by her brother, who whispered low in her ear:—

“A brand, Molly dear, plucked from the burning.”

Molly turned her eyes upon her brother with a glad smile as she re-entered her little room, and shut the door.

Chapter Seven.

Twelve months passed away, and Christmas came again, with its frost and snow and sunshine—its blazing fires, its good cheer, and its merry greetings.

Many a Christmastide had now passed over the head of our blacksmith, John Thorogood, and his excellent wife Mary, but Time had touched them lightly in its flight. They both looked young and hale, and full of vigour. The only difference in them was a wrinkle or two at the corners of the eyes, and a few grey hairs mingling with the brown. Perhaps John was a little more corpulent than when he was a youth; but he could wield the fore-hammer as easily and powerfully as ever.

A cloud, however, had been gathering over their happy home during the past year. Molly—the sweet active girl who had never known a day's illness from her childhood—had fallen into bad health. Her step had lost its spring, but her cheerful spirit was unsubdued.

"You're better to-day, Molly darling?" asked the smith, in a tone which showed he was not sure of the answer.

"Yes, father, much better." Molly did not use endearing terms, but the sweetness of her looks and voice rendered such needless.

She was pale and thin, and could not check the touch of sadness in her tones.

"Fred is sure to come, darling," said Mrs Thorogood, stopping in her preparations for supper to smooth her daughter's fair head.

"Oh yes, mother, I know that Fred is sure to come," returned Molly, with a laugh and a little blush. "No fear of him. I was not thinking of him, but of Jim. It is the first Christmas we shall have spent without him. Dear Jim! I wonder what company he will have to spend it with him in the backwoods."

"Whatever company it may be," returned the mother, "they'll only have his body and mind—his spirit will be here."

"Well said, old Moll; we shall have the best part of him to-night in spite of the Atlantic Ocean," cried the blacksmith, who was seated on a stool making fun with the terrier, the cat, and the kitten—not the original animals, of course, but

the lineal descendants of those which were introduced at the beginning of our tale.

“I hope they won’t be late,” remarked Mrs Thorogood, looking with some anxiety into a big pot which rested on the roaring fire.

“The boys are never late, Moll,” remarked the smith, giving the cat a sly poke on the nose, which it resented with a fuff, causing the terrier to turn its head on one side inquiringly.

As he spoke the front door opened, and feet were heard in the passage stamping off the snow.

“There they are!” exclaimed old Moll, slipping the lid on the big pot, and wiping her hands hastily.

“No, it is too soon for them yet; they’re always sharp to time. It is Fred,” said Molly with a quiet smile.

She was right. Fred Harper, a fine strapping young fellow—a carpenter—had met Molly in London, and got engaged to her. She offered to let him off when she became ill and delicate, but he would not be let off. “Molly,” this enthusiast had said, “if you were to become so thin that all your flesh were to disappear, I’d be proud to marry your skeleton!”

Fred sat down by her side, but had scarcely begun to make earnest inquiries after her health, when the outer door again opened, and another stamping of feet was heard in the passage. It was a tremendous stamping, and accompanied with strong, loud, manly voices.

“No mistake now!” said the smith, rising and opening the door, when in walked four such men as any father and mother might be proud of. It was not that they were big—plenty of blockheads are big: nor was it that they were handsome—plenty of nincompoops are well-favoured; but, besides being tall, and strong, and handsome, they were free, and hearty, and sensible, and wise—even in their joviality—and so thorough-going in word, sentiment, and act, that it was quite a pleasure merely to sit still and watch them, and listen.

“I told ’ee they’d come in their togs, old woman,” said the smith, as his son Tom appeared, dusting the snow from his Coastguard uniform, on the breast of which was displayed the gold medal of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

“You might be sure of that, mother, seeing that we had promised,” said Dick, the blithe and hearty man-of-war’s man, as he printed a kiss on his mother’s cheek that might have been heard, as he truly said, “from the main truck to the keelson.” At the same time bushy-browed Harry, with the blue coat and brass epaulettes of the fire-brigade, was paying a similar tribute of affection to his sister, while fiery Bob,—the old uniform on his back and the Victoria Cross on his breast,—seized his father’s hand in both of his with a grip that quite satisfied that son of Vulcan, despite the absence of two of the fingers.

They were all deep-chested, strong-voiced men in the prime of life; and what a noise they did make, to be sure!

“You’re not too soon, boys,” said the smith; “old Moll has been quite anxious about a mysterious something in the big pot there.”

“Let me help you to take it off the fire, mother,” said the gallant tar, stepping forward.

“Nay, that’s my duty,” cried Harry, leaping to the front, and seizing the pot, which he dragged from the flames with professional ability.

When the something was displayed, it was found to be a gorgeous meat-pudding of the most tempting character—round and heavy like a cannon-ball. Of course it did not flourish alone. Old Moll had been mysteriously engaged the greater part of that day over the fire, and the result was a feast worthy, as her husband said, “of the King of the Cannibal Islands.”

“Talking of Cannibal Islands,” said Dick, the sailor, during a pause in the feast, “you’ve no idea what a glorious place that Pacific Ocean is, with its coral islands, palm-groves, and sunshine. It would be just the place to make you well again, Molly. You’d grow fat in a month.”

“Ha; get fat, would she,” growled Bob, the soldier, “so as to be ready for the first nigger-chief that took a fancy to have her cooked for supper—eh? Never fear, Molly, we won’t let you go to the Cannibal Islands. Give us another cut o’ that

cannon-ball, mother. It's better eating than those I've been used to see skipping over the battlefield."

"But they're not all Cannibal Islands, man," returned Dick; "why, wherever the missionaries go, there the niggers get to be as well-behaved as you are. D'you know, Molly, I've really been thinking of cutting the service, and emigrating somewhere, if you and Fred would go with me."

"It would be charming!" replied Molly, with a sweet though languid smile. "We'd live in a wooden hut, roofed with palm-leaves, and while you and Fred were away hunting for dinner, I would milk the buffaloes, and boil the cocoa-nuts!"

"Ah, Molly," said Tom, the Coastguardsman, stroking his bushy beard, "the same idea has been running in my head, as well as in Dick's, ever since we got that letter from Jim, telling us of the beauty of his new home, and urging us all to emigrate. I've more than half a mind to join him out there, if you and the old folk will consent to go."

"You're not serious, are you, Tom?" asked Harry, the fireman, laying down his knife and fork.

"Indeed I am."

"Well, you might do worse. I would join you myself, if there were only houses enough to insure a fire or two every month."

"Why, man," said Fred Harper, "in these lands the whole forest goes on fire sometimes—surely that would suffice to keep your spirits up and your heart warm."

"Let's have a look at Jim's last epistle, mother," said Dick, when the feast was nearly over, and fragrant coffee smoked upon the board, (for you know the Thorogood Family were total abstainers), "and let Fred read it aloud. He's by far the best reader amongst us."

"Well, that's not sayin' much for him," remarked the fireman, with a sly glance at his sister.

“Your lamp is not as powerful as it might be, mother,” said Fred, drawing his chair nearer to that of the fair invalid, as he unfolded the letter. “Turn your eyes this way, Molly,—there, keep ’em steady on the page; I can see now!”

“Eagle’s Nest, Rocky Mountain Slopes, 5th October 18—,” began Fred. “Darling Mother,—You’ve no idea what a charming place God has given me here, with plenty of work to do of the most congenial kind. I have only an opportunity for a short letter this time, because the postboy has arrived unexpectedly, and won’t wait. Postboy! You would smile at that word if you saw him. He’s a six-foot man in leather, with a big beard, and a rifle and tomahawk. He was attacked by Indians on the way over the mountains, but escaped, and he attacked a grizzly bear afterwards which didn’t escape—but I must not waste time on him, Well, I must devote all my letter this post to urging you to come out. This is a splendid country for big, strong, hearty, willing men like father and my brothers. Of course it is no better than other countries—rather worse—for weak men, either in mind or body. Idlers go to the wall here as elsewhere; but for men willing and able to work—ready to turn their hands to anything—it is a splendid opening. For myself—I feel that my Heavenly Father has sent me here because there is work for me to do, and a climate which will give me health and strength to do it. My health is better now than it has ever been mince the day of that fall which damaged my constitution so much as to render me one of the confirmed cripples of the earth. But it was a blessed fall, nevertheless. I was cast down in order that I might be lifted up. You would smile, mother,—perhaps you’d laugh—if you saw me at my work. I’m a Jack-of-all-trades. Among other things I’m a farmer, a gardener, a carpenter, a schoolmaster, a shoemaker, and a missionary! The last, you know, I consider my real calling. The others are but secondary matters, assumed in the spirit of Paul the tent-maker. You and dear Molly would rejoice with me if you saw my Bible Class on week-days, and my congregation on Sundays. It is a strange congregation to whom I have been sent to tell the old old story of Jesus and His love. There are farmers, miners, hunters, even painted savages among them. My church is usually a barn—sometimes a tent—often the open air. There are no denominations here, so that I belong to none. Only two sects exist—believers and unbelievers. But the place is growing fast. Doubtless there will be great changes ere long. Meanwhile it is my happy duty and privilege to scatter seed in the wilderness.

“Now, I urge you to come, because there is health for Molly to be found on these sunny slopes of this grand Backbone of America. That is my strongest point. If that does not move you, nothing else will! One glance from the

windows of my wooden house—this Eagle's Nest on the Rocky Mountain Slopes—would be sufficient to begin the work of convalescence. Woods, dells, knolls, hills, plains, prairies, lakes, streams—with the blue mountains in the far, far distance. Oh! if I were a poet, what a flight I would make into the realms of—of—well, you understand me! I have no time for more. The big-bearded postboy is growing impatient. Only this much will I add,—do, do come, if you love me. My kindest love to you all. May God guide you in this matter.—Your affectionate son, Jim.

"P.S.—One of the members of my congregation is a celebrated hunter named Reuben Dale. His wife is also one of my flock, and so is his friend Jacob Strang. The manner in which Reuben got married is so curious that I have amused myself by writing an account of it for mother. I enclose it."

"Read the story aloud, Fred," said Molly. "What Jim thought interesting must be well worth reading."

Thus urged, Fred took the manuscript and read as follows:—

The Hunter's Wedding.

A Story of the Rocky Mountains.

On the summit of a green knoll, in one of those beautiful valleys which open from the prairies—like inviting portals—into the dark recesses of the Rocky Mountains, there stands, or stood not long ago, a small blockhouse surrounded by a wooden palisade.

Although useless as a protection from artillery, this building was found to be a sufficient defence against the bullets and arrows of the red men of North America, and its owner, Kenneth MacFearsome, a fiery Scotch Highlander, had, up to the date on which our story opens, esteemed it a convenient and safe place for trade with the warlike savages who roamed, fought, and hunted in the regions around it. Some people, referring to its peaceful purposes, called it MacFearsome's trading post. Others, having regard to its military aspect, styled it Mac's Fort.

Reuben Dale stood at the front gate of the Fort conversing with a pretty, dark-haired, bright-faced girl of eighteen years or thereabouts: Reuben himself being twenty-eight, and as strapping a hunter of the Rocky Mountains as ever

outwitted a redskin or circumvented a grizzly bear. But Reuben was naturally shy. He had not the courage of a rabbit when it came to making love.

“Loo,” said Reuben, resting his hand on the muzzle of his long rifle and his chin on his hands, as he gazed earnestly down into the quiet, soft little face at his elbow.

“Well, Reuben,” said Loo, keeping her eyes prudently fixed on the ground lest they should betray her.

The conversation stopped short at this interesting point, and was not resumed. Indeed, it was effectually checked by the sudden appearance of The MacFearsome.

“What, have ye not managed it yet, Reuben?” said the Highlander, as his daughter tripped quickly away.

“Not yet,” said the hunter despondingly.

“Man, you’re not worth a gunflint,” returned MacFearsome, with a twinkling glance from under his bushy grey eyebrows; “if ye had not saved Loo’s life twice, and mine three times, I’d scorn to let you wed her. But you’ll have to settle it right off, for the parson won’t stop another day. He counted on spendin’ only one day here, on his way to the conference, and he has been two days already. You know it’ll take him all his time to get to Beaver Creek by the tenth.”

“But I’ll mount him on my best buffalo-runner and guide him myself by a short cut,” said the hunter, “so that he shall still be in good time for the circumference, and—”

“The conference, Reuben; don’t misuse the English language. But it’s of no use, I tell you. He won’t stop another day, so you must have it settled right off to-day, for it shall never be said that a MacFearsome was married without the benefit of the clergy.”

“Well, I’ll do it—slick off;” said the hunter, shouldering his rifle, and striding away in the direction of a coppice into which he had observed Loo disappear, with the air of a man who meant to pursue and kill a dangerous creature.

We will not do Reuben Dale the injustice to lift the curtain at this critical point in his history. Suffice it to say that he went into that coppice pale and came out red—so red that his handsome sunburned countenance seemed on the point of catching fire. There was a pleased expression on it, however, which was eminently suggestive.

He went straight to a wigwam which stood near the fort, lifted the skin door, entered, and sat down beside the fire opposite to a hunter not unlike himself. The man was as tall and strong, though not quite so good-looking. He was at the time smoking one of those tomahawks which some Indians have made with pipe bowls in their heads, the handles serving for stems, so that, when not employed in splitting skulls, they may be used for damaging stomachs—i.e. for smoking tobacco!

“I’ve done it, Jacob Strang,” said Reuben, with a grave nod, as he slowly filled his pipe.

These two hunters were knit together with somewhat of the love that David bore to Jonathan. Jacob gazed at his friend for some time in mute admiration.

“Honour bright?” he asked at length.

“Honour bright,” replied Reuben.

“Well now,” said Jacob to the cloud that issued from his lips, “I couldn’t ha’ done that to save my scalp. I’ve tried it, off an’ on for the last six year, and alers stuck at the p’int—or raither just before it, for I never got quite the length o’ the p’int. But I’ve bin very near it, Reuben, more than once, uncommon near. One time I got so close to the edge o’ the precipice that another inch would have sent me right over. ‘My dear Liz,’ says I; but I stuck there, an’ the sweet little thing runned away, larfin’, an’ so I’m a bachelor still. But I’m right glad, Reuben, that you’ve got it over at last. How did it feel?”

“Feel!” echoed the hunter, “it felt as bad, or wuss, nor the time that grizzly bar up the Yellowstone River got his claws into the small o’ my back—only I hadn’t you to help me out o’ the difficulty this time. I had to do it all myself, Jacob, and hard work it was, I tell ’ee, boy. Hows’ever, it’s all over now, an’ we’re to be spliced this evenin’.”

“That’s raither sharp work, ain’t it, Reuben?” said Jacob, with a critical wrinkle of his eyebrows, and a remonstrative tone in his voice. “I ain’t much of an authority on sitch matters, but it do seem to me as if you might have given the poor gal a day or two to make sure whether her head or heels was uppermost.”

“You’re right, Jacob; you’re judgment was always sound, but, you see, I was forced to do it slick off because the parson won’t wait another day, an’ I’d like to have it done all ship-shape, for I’ve a respec’ for the parsons, you see. A man who’s come straight down from the Pilgrim Fathers, like me, behoves to act discreetly—so, the weddin’s to be this evenin’.”

“Well, you are the best judge, Reuben, an’ it’s as well that it should come off when old Fiddlestrings is here, for a weddin’ without a fiddle ain’t much of a spree. By good luck, too, there’s the lads from Buffalo Creek at the fort just now, so we’ll muster strong. No, I wouldn’t give much for a weddin’ without a good dance—not even yours, Reuben.”

That afternoon The MacFearsome arranged with the Reverend William Tucker to delay his departure for one day in order to unite his only daughter Loo to Reuben Dale.

“You must know, Mr Tucker,” he explained, in a slightly apologetic tone, “although Reuben is only a hunter, his parents were gentlefolks. They died when Reuben was quite a little fellow, so that he was allowed to run wild on a frontier settlement, and, as a matter of course, took to the wilderness as naturally as a young duck takes to the water. But Reuben is a superior person, Mr Tucker, I assure you, and as fine a disposition as you could wish. He’s as bold as a lion too, and has saved my girl’s life twice, and my own three times—so, you see, he—”

“He deserves a good wife,” said the Reverend William Tucker heartily.

“Just so,” replied the old trader, wrinkling his fierce yet kindly face with a bland smile, “and you’ll confer a great favour on me if you will stay and perform the ceremony. Of course, according to Scotch law, we could marry them without your assistance, but I respect the church, Mr Tucker, and think it becoming to have a clergyman on occasions of this kind.”

Having settled this important piece of business, Kenneth MacFearsome went off to make arrangements for the indispensable dance, and the clergyman, being fond of equestrian exercise, went out alone for an afternoon ride.

That same afternoon a band of Indians belonging to the Blackfeet tribe encamped in a gloomy defile of the Rocky Mountains, not far from Mac's Fort. It was easy to see that they were a war-party, for, besides being armed to the teeth, their faces were hideously painted, and they had no women or children with them.

They had stopped for the double purpose of eating a hasty meal and holding a council of war.

One of the warriors stood up in the midst of his brethren and made a speech, which, to judge from its effect on the others, must have been highly inflammatory and warlike. During the delivery of it he turned his ugly visage frequently, and pointed, with his blue-striped nose, as it were, in the direction of Fort MacFearsome.

Whatever might have been the tendency of the speech, it was suddenly cut short by the sound of a horse's hoofs clattering in the glen below. After bestowing a united eagle glance on the approaching horseman, the Blackfeet warriors turned a look of intelligence on each other, lay flat down in the long grass, and melted from the scene as completely and silently as snow-wreaths melt before the sun in spring.

The Reverend William Tucker was a muscular Christian. That is to say, he believed that the body, as well as the soul, ought to be cultivated to the highest possible extent—both having the same origin—and held that physical health, strength, and vigour, if not absolutely necessary to the advancement of Christianity in the earth, were at least eminently conducive thereto. Holding such opinions, and being powerfully built, he threw himself heart and soul into whatever he did. Hence the clatter of his horse's hoofs as he galloped swiftly up the glen.

But the Reverend William Tucker was also merciful, and not only drew rein when the path became too steep, but dismounted and led his steed by the bridle when he reached the rugged ground near the spot where the war-party had melted away.

Great and grand were the preparations made for the approaching festivities at Mac's Fort. Michel, the cook, constructed a venison pie, the tin dish of which, (repaired expressly for the occasion that afternoon by the Fort blacksmith), might have served for a bath to an average baby. The carpenter arranged the hall, or large public room, cleared away the tables, fitted up a device in evergreens which was supposed to represent the words Loo and Reu, and otherwise garnished the ball-room with specimens of his originality and taste, while old Fiddlestrings, who was a self-taught half-breed, fitted to his violin a new string made by his wife that day from a deer-sinew.

When the hour arrived for the performance of the ceremony, Reuben Dale appeared among the men of the Fort, dressed, not like a gentleman in broadcloth, but, in hunter's costume of the most approved cut and material—a yellow deerskin coat, ornamented with bead and quill work; blue cloth leggings, a small fur cap, moccasins garnished with silk flowers, fitting as tight to his feet as gloves fit the hands, and a crimson worsted sash round his waist. He also wore, slung on his shoulder by scarlet worsted cords, a powder-horn and shot-pouch—not that these implements of the chase were necessary to the occasion, but because he would as soon have thought of appearing at any time without them as without his nose. For the same reason his rifle accompanied him to the wedding.

A short time before the appointed hour the bride-elect adorned herself in simple yet tasteful costume, which, being peculiar to no particular nation or time, we prefer to leave to the reader's imagination, merely remarking that as Loo was simple and pretty her garb corresponded to her appearance and character.

But the appointed hour passed, and the Reverend William Tucker did not appear. Hunters of the Rocky Mountains, however, are not an impatient race. Reuben quietly waited as he would have done for a good shot at game. Not so The MacFearsome. His Celtic blood fired, and he muttered a few uncomplimentary remarks about the reverend absentee, which it is well not to repeat.

As time passed, however, the dwellers in Mac's Fort became anxious, then alarmed, and finally the wedding was postponed, while a search for the lost one was organised; but they searched in vain, because tracks which might easily be traced in the wilderness get inextricably mixed up in the vicinity of a fort.

Next day Kenneth MacFearsome, coming rather hastily and angrily to the conclusion that Mr Tucker had given them the slip and gone off to his conference, determined himself to perform the marriage ceremony as directed in the Church of England Prayer-Book.

"You see, Reuben," he said, "I have a great respect for the Church, and would fain have had this matter knocked off by one of its parsons, but as this parson appears to be little better than a wolf in sheep's clothing—if as good—I'll just do it myself, for I'll not have my daughter's wedding delayed another day for any man, woman, or beast alive."

"Wouldn't it be as well, sir," suggested the hunter modestly, "to have a hunt after the parson by daylight first?"

"No, it wouldn't," said the old trader, with the air and decision of—we were going to say the great Mogul, but perhaps it would be more emphatic and appropriate to say—The MacFearsome.

Knowing that appeal from that decision would be in vain, Reuben once more arrayed himself in the wedding dress, (which he had changed when the search for Mr Tucker was undertaken), and once again presented himself before his admiring friends in the decorated hall of Mac's Fort. The cook warmed up his gigantic pie, old Fiddlestrings re-tuned his home-made violin, and pretty little Loo at last appeared on the scene with two half-breed young women as bridesmaids, and two Indian females as backers-up.

"My friends," said Kenneth MacFearsome, taking up the prayer-book, and commencing a speech which he had spent the entire forenoon in preparing, "I have a few words to say to you on this interesting occasion."

The old gentleman's usually stern and handsome countenance had relaxed, and assumed a bland, sweet expression, which was more consonant with the circumstances in which they were assembled. Before he could utter another word, however, he was interrupted, to his great surprise, by Reuben.

"Excuse me, Mr MacFearsome," said that bold though bashful hunter, "but my friend and comrade, Jacob Strang, has not yet arrived, and it would grieve me to the heart if he was absent at such a time as this. Couldn't we wait a bit? I wouldn't ask you to do so for any other man alive, but I've hunted wi' him since we were slips of boys, and—and I can't help thinkin' that somethin's gone

wrong wi' him, for Jacob's good and true, and trusty as steel, an' wasn't used to fail in his engagements."

While the hunter was speaking the bland expression faded from the Highlander's countenance, and a fierce look flashed from his blue eyes as he replied in stern, decided tones:—

"Reuben Dale, if your friend Jacob was the great Israel of Bible story, or even Moses himself, I would not wait for him. Don't interrupt me again, lad."

He turned to the assembled company with a wave of his hand, as if to dismiss the interruption from memory, and attempted to reassume the benignant expression, with only partial success.

"My friends," he said, but said no more, for at that moment he was a second time interrupted. A shout was heard outside, the door of the hall burst open, and Jacob Strang himself strode in, bearing the Reverend William Tucker on his shoulders.

Depositing his burden on the floor, he said hurriedly, "He's not dead, only stunned. The reptiles did their best to kill him. They're not far off, MacFearsome. We'd better go after them."

The MacFearsome usually gave vent to his feelings in Gaelic when labouring under strong excitement. On this occasion his utterances were terrible in tone whatever their meaning might be.

"Go after them?" he cried, in a blaze of wrath, "yes, we'll go after them. Saddle my horse and fetch my gun. Arm yourself, boys! Some of you will remain to guard the Fort, and see that you keep the gates shut. Can you guide us to the villains, Jacob?"

"I can at least follow up the trail."

"Stay, I can guide you," said a voice behind them.

It was the Reverend William Tucker himself, who had recovered, and was sitting up on the floor looking rather confused.

“No, sir; you will remain at the Fort and take care of the women,” said MacFearsome gruffly.

In a few minutes the Chief of the Fort was galloping over the prairie at the back of his establishment, followed by six of his best men, with Reuben Dale, and led by Jacob Strang.

In thus giving chase to the red men the Highlander did not act with his wonted caution. His wrath was too much for him.

Jacob the hunter, while out after deer, had come on the trail of the war-party of Blackfeet. Suspecting them of mischief, he had followed them up and found them just at the time when they made prisoner of Mr Tucker. He saw them bind the unlucky pastor and carry him off, mounted behind a savage chief. Jacob chanced fortunately to be concealed in a rugged piece of ground where horses could not act. As the Indians were riding away he shot the horse that bore the pastor, and at the same time uttered a series of yells and extempore war-whoops so appalling that the savages gave him credit for being at least a dozen foes, and fled over a ridge before turning to see what had happened. The fall of the horse had stunned the pastor, but the Indian leaped up and drew his knife. Fortunately Jacob’s rifle was a double-barrelled one. Uttering another ferocious yell he fired, and by good fortune hit the right arm of the Indian chief, who, dropping his knife, followed his companions like a hunted stag. Jacob immediately dashed out of his ambush, lifted the reverend gentleman on his own horse, which he had left in a hollow close at hand, and brought him, as we have seen, safe back to the Fort.

Now, if the white men had been satisfied with this, all would have been well, but The MacFearsome had been roused, as we have said, and set off needlessly in pursuit of the savages. It chanced that the Blackfeet had arranged to attack the Fort in two bands that night—advancing on it from opposite directions. The consequence was that while MacFearsome and his men were away after one band, the other—a much larger band—ignorant of what had occurred to their comrades, advanced after dusk on the Fort, and gave the signal for attack. They were surprised at receiving no reply from their comrades, but did not delay the assault on that account.

The men who had been left in charge of the Fort were quite worthy of the trust. Stationing themselves a few yards apart all round the palisades inside, they kept guard. Mr Tucker, armed with an axe-handle as a bludgeon—for he

objected to taking life if he could avoid it—mounted guard at the gate. Pretty little Loo kept him company. The other women were stationed so as to carry ammunition to the men, or convey orders from the blacksmith who had been left in command.

“This is a sad interruption to your wedding,” remarked the pastor, as he leaned against the Fort gate, and examined his weapon.

“It is,” assented Loo meekly, “but you will marry us to-morrow. My father will return too late to have it done to-night, I fear.”

“However late he comes we must get the ceremony over to-night, Loo, for I positively cannot delay my journey another day. Indeed, even as it is, I shall be late for the conference of my brethren. Hark! What sound was that?”

“I heard nothing but the hoot of an owl,” said Loo.

As she spoke an arrow, entering between the palisades, whizzed past her. At the same moment a volley was fired from the other side of the Fort.

“Keep closer to the gate, Loo,” said Mr Tucker, grasping his club with a feeling that the girl’s safety depended on the use he made of that unclerical weapon.

“Come round to the east angle, all of you,” shouted the blacksmith.

All the men in the Fort obeyed the summons in time to repel a vigorous assault made on that point by what seemed to be the whole band of the enemy, but the bride and one of her maids remained at the front gate to keep watch there. Just as the victory was gained and the enemy were driven off at the east angle, a loud scream was given by the women. Mr Tucker heard it and was first to run to the rescue. He found that three of the Blackfeet, during the assault on the other side, had crept round to the front gate. One of these had placed his head against the stockade, a second had mounted on his shoulders, and a third had thus gained the top of the pickets.

Seeing at a glance how matters stood, Mr Tucker ran forward and thrust his bludgeon with a straight point between the posts, right into the painted face of the lower savage, who fell back at once, carrying the second savage along with him: but the third had already laid his hands on the top, and, vaulting over with monkey-like agility, came down on the pastor’s shoulders with such

violence that both rolled together on the ground. But the savage was no match for the athletic pastor, who compressed his throat with a grip that soon caused him to relax his hold.

“Here, give me your kerchief, Loo,” gasped the pastor; “I’ll tie his hands.”

“Why don’t you stick him?” asked one of Loo’s bridesmaids with great simplicity.

“Because I won’t take life if I can help it,” replied Mr Tucker as he bound the Indian’s wrists.

At that moment there arose a wild war-whoop from another part of the Fort, and a volume of smoke and flame burst from the back of the chief dwelling-house which stood in the centre of the square. The Blackfeet had gained an entrance at another point, and set fire to the western wing of the building unperceived.

With a shout of rage the blacksmith and his men rushed to the scene of disaster.

“There’s father!” said Loo, with a cry of joy.

“Where?” exclaimed Mr Tucker, looking round with a bewildered air.

“Help to open the gate,” cried Loo.

The pastor did so at once, and, as he heaved at the bar which held it, he could hear the clatter of hoofs and the shouts of men outside.

The heavy gate swung back just as the cavalcade came up, and they dashed in at full gallop.

“Open the back gate wide, Loo, and leave this one open, too,” shouted MacFearsome, as he flew past like an enraged thunderbolt.

Our bride possessed that most valuable quality, a tendency to prompt, unquestioning obedience. Running lightly to the other side of the Fort she undid the fastenings and forced the back gate wide open. Meanwhile her father and our bridegroom, with his friend Jacob and the six men, charged down on

the savages with wild yells of fury. The sight of them was sufficient! The Blackfeet turned and fled through the open gates in consternation. As they coursed towards the woods like hares the blacksmith managed to turn on them a small ship's-cannon loaded with buckshot, which awoke the echoes of the wilderness with a deafening roar. The horsemen also pursued and scattered them right and left. Then the gates were reclosed, while the bright flame of the burning buildings lit up the scene as at noon-day.

"Hold your hands now, boys," shouted MacFearsome, drawing rein.

Those nearest to the chief obeyed, and the others, soon perceiving what was being done, rejoined their comrades.

"Where is Reuben?" asked MacFearsome, as they were turning towards the Fort.

Each looked at the other, but none could answer.

"I saw him down in the hollow, charging the Indians," said one.

"And I saw him coming back by the stable-fence," said another.

"Off with you to both places and look for him," cried the chief, "and the rest of you follow me."

They searched swiftly to and fro for some minutes, and soon found his riderless horse. Then a cry from one of their number was heard from the hollow. Galloping thither they found Reuben lying on his back, apparently dead, with an arrow in his chest.

In a moment Jacob was on his knees at his friend's side, and soon the arrow was extracted, but it was found that blood gushed freely from the wound. Stanching this as best they could they bore the wounded man carefully to the Fort.

"Oh, father! I hope the fight is over now," exclaimed Loo, as her sire rode through the gateway.

"Yes, the fight is over," replied the Highlander, sternly, "but it has cost us much. Our house is on fire and Reuben is—"

He did not finish the sentence. Indeed, there was no occasion to do so, for, while he spoke, the men advanced who bore Reuben's all but lifeless body.

Loo did not scream or utter a word, but her white face and compressed lips told their own tale as she walked by her bridegroom's side into the hall which had been so gaily fitted up, but was now a blackened and partially burned room.

While the hunter's wound was being examined every one, save the pastor and the women, was sent from the hall to aid in extinguishing the fire, which had been nearly subdued. MacFearsome was somewhat expert as an amateur doctor, and so was the Reverend William Tucker. Their united opinion was that the hunter's case was a very grave one. They did all that could be done to stop the bleeding and sustain the strength of the wounded man, whose consciousness returned after a short time.

"Is it all over with me, father?" asked Reuben, in a faint voice, addressing The MacFearsome for the first time by that endearing title.

"I fear it is, my son," replied the Chief. "You know it is not my habit to mince matters at any time, and I don't think you are such a baby as to fear death when it is sent to you. However, I will not say that your case is hopeless till I have tried my medicine on you—so keep up your heart, Reuben."

"Father," said Reuben, "will you allow me to be alone with Loo, for a little?"

"Certainly, my dear boy, but you must have your medicine first."

Reuben replied with a smile and a nod.

After taking the physic he was left alone with Loo. For some time neither could speak. At last Loo said, "Oh, Reuben dear! you are not going to die?"

"I hope not, dearest, but when the Lord's time comes we must be ready to answer to our names. If I am to go now I would spend the few hours that remain to me listening to your sweet voice reading the Master's Word."

"Reuben," said Loo, with sudden animation, "will you grant me a favour?"

“You know I will, whatever it be,” replied the hunter, with a languid smile; “what is it?”

“That we may be married to-night—within this hour,” said Loo, with decision.

“Why? Of what use to wed a dying man?”

“Because I want to nurse you as your wife, to the end, if it be His will that you shall go, and I wish to be for ever after called by your dear name.”

“It is a strange notion—a sweet one to me, dearest Loo. It shall be as you wish. Call father.”

At first the Highlander strongly objected to the wish of his child, but Loo knew how to overcome her father’s objections! In the course of half-an-hour Reuben sent for Mr Tucker. The MacFearsome’s medicine, whatever it was, was potent as well as patent. Reuben was able to talk with considerable energy when the pastor appeared—summoned, as he fancied, to prepare the dying man for the great change. Great, therefore, was his amazement when Reuben begged of him to make arrangements for performing the interrupted marriage ceremony within half-an-hour.

“But you seem to be dying, friend?” said the perplexed pastor.

“That may be so,” replied the hunter quietly, “but Loo wants to be wed before I die, and we’d better waste no time about it.”

There was no resisting this, so the Reverend William Tucker made arrangements for the wedding, while The MacFearsome and his men were busied extinguishing the last sparks of the fire.

It was near midnight before these arrangements were completed. Then the men were summoned once more to the Hall, but how different were their feelings now from what they had been earlier on that day! The occupation of old Fiddlestrings was gone. Even the huge pie was dismissed from the scene. The wedding guests crept quietly in, their gay costumes torn and covered with charcoal, and bearing other evidences of the recent conflict. They were very silent, too, and sad, for they were aware of the critical condition of the bridegroom.

When all was at last prepared a new and unexpected difficulty arose. It was found that Reuben had fallen into a sound sleep!

Thereupon a whispered but anxious conversation took place at the end of the hall farthest from the wounded man's couch.

"We must waken him," said MacFearsome, with stern look and tone.

"No, father," said Loo, with a tearful smile, "we must wait."

"Your daughter is right," whispered Mr Tucker. "Whatever be the condition of Reuben, sleep is the best thing for him."

"But you must start for your conference at four in the morning, and he may not awake before that," objected MacFearsome.

Their perplexities were suddenly removed by Reuben himself, who awoke while they were consulting, and asked his friend Jacob—who watched at his side with the tenderness of a brother—where Loo had gone to.

"She's here, Reuben, waitin' to get married," replied his friend.

The hunter roused himself, looked hastily round, raised himself one one elbow, and said in a strong voice, "Come, I'm ready now. Let's get it over."

Immediately Loo was at his side; the whole party assembled round his couch; the pastor opened his book, and in these exceptional circumstances Reuben Dale and Louisa MacFearsome were married!

"Now, Reuben dear," whispered Loo, as she pressed his lips, "lie down again and go to sleep."

"On one condition only," said the wounded man, with something like a twinkle in his eye, "that you go on with the wedding feast. Jacob says a wedding is worth nothing without a dance. Now, as this wedding is worth all the world to me, Loo, I'm determined that it shall be worth something to my old friend and comrade."

It was found that remonstrances were in vain, so, as resistance to his wishes might have proved hurtful to the invalid, the wedding feast was continued and

carried through with far more vigour than might have been expected, Reuben himself being, apparently, one of the most interested spectators.

So Jacob had his dance, and he performed his part with unwonted energy,—for the sake of pleasing his friend rather than himself.

When the lights were waxing low, and the great pie had been eaten, and old Fiddlestrings had been used up, Reuben called his friend to his side.

"What with searchin'," he said, "an' fightin', and fire-stoppin' an' dancin' you've had a pretty stiff time of it, Jacob. But you're a strong man—leastwise you used to be—an' I daresay there's plenty of go in you yet."

"I'm fresh as a lark, Reuben," replied his friend. "What want ye wi' me?"

"I just want ye go fetch your horse, an' saddle my best buffalo-runner for the parson, an' take him to Beaver Creek. Do it as fast as you can, Jacob, and by the short cut, and don't spare the cattle."

"I'll do it, Reuben."

Jacob was a man of few words. He did it, and thus it came to pass that when grey dawn began to break over Mac's Fort, it found the Reverend William Tucker and his guide scouring over the western plains at the rate of thirty or forty miles an hour—more or less—while Reuben Dale lay sound asleep in his blood-stained wedding dress, his strong hand clasping that of pretty little Loo, who was also sound asleep, in an easy chair by his side.

About the same time The MacFearsome flung himself down on his half-burned bed, where in dreams—to judge from his snorting, snoring, and stertorous breathing—he waged war with the whole Blackfeet race single-handed!

When the pastor bade farewell to Reuben he had done so with the sad feelings of one who expected never to see his face again, but the pastor's judgment was at fault. Reuben Dale lived—he lived to become as strong and able a hunter of the Rocky Mountains as ever he had been; he lived to take Loo to the western settlements, and squat down beside The MacFearsome's new farm, as a species of hunting farmer; he lived to become a respected member of the Reverend William Tucker's church in the wilderness, where he filled two pews with little Dales, which, as an Irish comrade remarked, was a dale more than he

deserved; and last, but not least, he lived to urge, argue, badger, bamboozle, worry, and haul Jacob Strang up to that "p'int" at which he had so often stuck before, but over which he finally fell, and managed to secure that "dear Liz" who was destined to become the sunshine of his after-life.

In regard to this matter, Jacob was wont to say to his friend at times, when he was particularly confidential, that "the catchin' of Liz was the best bit of trappin' he had done since he took to huntin' in the Rocky Mountains, and that if it hadn't bin for his chum Reuben Dale, he never would have bin able to come up to the p'int, much less git over it, though he had lived to the age of Methuselah and hunted for a wife all the time."

"A good story," said Dick Thorogood, as Fred folded up the manuscript; "but to return to matter of greater importance than this hunter's wedding, curious though it be: what about emigrating?"

"I'll go, for one!" exclaimed the blacksmith bringing his huge fist down with a heavy thud on the table.

"John, John, it's not the anvil you've got before you," said old Moll.

"No, nor yet is my fist the fore-hammer," rejoined the smith, with sparkling eyes. "Nevertheless, I repeat that I'll go—always supposing that you and Molly have no objections."

It was one of the dearest wishes of the old woman's heart to be near her crippled and favourite son, but she would not commit herself at once.

"What says Molly?" she asked, turning to her daughter.

Molly cast a sidelong glance at Fred, who gave the slightest possible nod, and then said, in her gentle voice, "The sooner we begin to pack the better!"

"Bravo, lass!" cried the young sailor, slapping his thigh; "well said, and we'll all go together. What say you, boys?"

"Agreed—agreed!" was the hearty reply.

And this was no idle talk. That night at worship, the father of the family spread Jim's letter, as he said, before the Lord, and asked for guidance. The end of the

whole matter was that, a few months later, the Thorogood family emigrated to the backwoods of America, and began that career of useful, energetic, patient, God-directed labour which ended in the formation of a happy garden in a part of the wilderness which had formerly been the haunt of wild beasts and wilder men.

And here, kind reader, we must close our little tale, for it would take a large book, if not two books, to tell the story of that thorough-going family's adventures while endeavouring to spread the truth in the Far West. Suffice it to say, that they all found what they went in search of—health and happiness—because they sought for these blessings in accordance with the teachings of the blessed Word of God