

# Joseph Hocking

## The Eternal Choice

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# The Eternal Choice

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# The Eternal Choice

By Joseph Hocking

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# Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking spiritual truth.

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“You don’t mind my being absolutely frank, do you?” continued Baxter after a somewhat awkward silence. “It’s years since I spoke to anyone about such things, and I really want to know.”

“To know what?” and the young minister looked at him wonderingly.

“Whether what you preach has any real meaning to you.”

“Why, hasn’t it to you?”

“Not a bit,” replied Baxter.

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JOSEPH HOCKING was a Cornish novelist and United Methodist Free Church minister. Like the American Presbyterian minister Edward Roe, Hocking’s novels combine rich characters with gripping stories. Joseph Hocking published more than 100 books and was greatly respected as a fiction writer. Hocking passed this life in 1937.

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# Prologue

EVELYN TEMPLETON was in a strange humor that day. She had been irritated by her father's remarks at the breakfast table that morning, and had seemed to resent the questions he had put to her. They were simple questions, too, and seemed to be of no importance whatever; yet Evelyn Templeton spoke and acted as if he had taken a liberty.

She was twenty-four years of age, and although in some lights she still appeared a girl, in others she looked as though her girlhood was fast passing away.

But she was still Evelyn Templeton, the only daughter of Sir William Templeton, Baronet, of Templeton Court, Lancashire, and her very name proclaimed the fact that she belonged to one of the most exclusive families in the whole of the North of England. She was regarded as a brilliant girl, too, and it was said that, in spite of her father's comparative poverty, she was still sought after by eligible swains. There were others, however, who said that Evelyn had missed her chances, and that she was in great danger of being left on the shelf.

Perhaps rumors of this had reached her, and thus, although the day was bright and her father had placed before her that very morning a card of invitation which proclaimed the fact that a birthday fête would be held at Barons Court in honor of young Baxter Lancaster, grandson of Amos Lancaster, the owner, on June 1st, she was, as we have said, in a strange humor.

Directly after breakfast was over she left the house, and walked in the direction of the park gates, although why she did this she could scarcely have told. On arriving there she had, without regarding the curtsy of the park keeper's daughter, looked up and down the road as if undecided what to do.

"May I tell your fortune, my pretty lady?"

Turning, Evelyn saw close to her an old, bent, shriveled woman. Whether she was a genuine Gypsy or not, Evelyn could not tell. Certainly

she might have been.

As we have said, Evelyn was in a strange humor that morning, for although she usually regarded anyone who suggested a Gypsy with impatience and aversion, she turned toward the old woman with a smile. After all, life was dull, in spite of the beautiful surroundings, and although two schoolgirl friends were coming to see her that afternoon, she longed for something exciting. "My fortune, mother!" she said with a laugh. "What do you know about telling fortunes?"

"For forty years have I told them," was the old woman's reply, "and never once did I tell a false one. Shall I tell yours, my pretty lady?"

"You want my hand crossed with silver, I suppose?"

"Naturally, my pretty lady; else the lines of destiny will not appear plainly."

"Destiny!" laughed the girl.

"Yes, destiny; the destiny from which none of us can escape."

"What do you know of destiny?" laughed Evelyn. "By the way," she added, as if in afterthought, "do you know this neighborhood?"

"I was never here before, pretty lady," exclaimed the old woman; "but I will tell your fortune truly."

The girl laughed good-humoredly. The suggestion of excitement which the old woman's presence brought had dispelled her bad humor, and she entered almost eagerly into the spirit of the moment. "Here is my palm," she said laughingly, "and here is the shilling with which it must be crossed."

The Gypsy took the shilling, and then made the sign of a cross on her hand. A moment later she gave a start. "You are a great lady," she said. "This is the hand of, a patrician."

"Never mind that," cried Evelyn. "Tell me my fortune."

"You are a great lady," repeated the Gypsy, "yet you have been dogged by poverty all your life. Yet, if you will have it so, you may, within the next few months, win a handsome man as your husband. A man who, although not your equal in birth, is ten times your equal in wealth. A gallant gentleman he is, too; and if you win him as your husband, you will be the envy of thousands."

"Do I know him?" asked the girl.

"Yes, you have seen him, and spoken to him, but you have always regarded yourself as so much above him that he has never declared his love for you."

“Who is he?” asked Evelyn. “What is his name?”

“That I may not tell you,” replied the Gypsy. “But this I know. A great fête will be given in honor of his birthday before many days are over, and this very day you have received an invitation to that fete.”

Evelyn laughed skeptically.

“Ah, you may laugh, my lady,” cried the Gypsy, “but destiny has appointed that he shall become the dominating influence of your life, and shall change the whole world for you.”

Evelyn Templeton laughed again, and soon after left the old woman, not at all displeased at what she called her adventure.

She returned to the great house shortly after this, but she said not a word to her father concerning her conversation with the Gypsy.

Two school friends came in the afternoon. One of them told her that she had, only on the night previous, become engaged to be married. There was, Evelyn thought, an air of patronage in her tones as she told her of this great event; so much so that the only daughter of Sir William Templeton was angry.

“Don’t you wish it were you?” asked the visitor with a challenging laugh.

“Not I!” retorted the girl. “I should hate the idea of being engaged.”

Both her visitors laughed incredulously, and one of them, not without a certain amount of bitterness, twitted her because of her danger of living and dying an old maid.

Perhaps Evelyn was under the influence of her meeting with the Gypsy that morning. Be that as it may, she hinted that she had only to give the slightest hint of her willingness in order to obtain an offer from the richest young man in Lancashire. This led to a good deal of badinage, until at length a wager was made between Evelyn and her girl visitors.

“When is your wedding to take place, Judy?” she asked.

“On September 1st,” was the reply. “Three months from next Tuesday. Of course, you will come?”

“I shall not only come,” replied Evelyn, “but I shall be able to tell you when I do come that arrangements for my own wedding are being made.”

“I bet you don’t,” cried the girl.

“What will you bet? Because I’m prepared to stake anything you like that I’ll be engaged to be married by September 1st.”

It was late in the evening when her visitors departed, but Evelyn Templeton's eyes still shone with excitement. To her there was something more than fascination in the thought that she would become the promised wife (although she had not mentioned his name to her visitors) of Baxter Lancaster before three months were over.

# 1. The Birthday Fête

“IT’S GOING TO BE A GRAND DAY, BAXTER!”

The speaker was an old man, fast approaching his eightieth year, but hale and strong nevertheless.

He got up from the breakfast table as he spoke, and looked out of the window over a fine stretch of parkland which was in the first glow of its summer loveliness. The sky, although it would have been called murky by people dwelling in purely rural districts, was, nevertheless, a great dome of comparative blue, and caused old Amos Lancaster to utter the remark which we have just set down.

“It looks promising, anyhow,” said the young man to whom the remark had been addressed, and who had been reading the Manchester Guardian, looking up from the newspaper which for the last five minutes had claimed his attention.

“Ay, it’s going to be a grand day,” old Amos Lancaster repeated, “and I expect a sight of folk will be here before the day is over.” He paused for a few minutes after he had spoken, looking steadily at the other all the time. “How art’a feeling, lad?” he ejaculated at length.

“All right, grandfather,” and the young man turned again to his newspaper.

“I hear the whole town is agog!” the old man went on after another silence.

“What wonder?” replied Baxter.

Amos chuckled like one greatly amused. “Ay,” he admitted, “I have never done such a thing before, and shall never do owt like it again; but I wanted to make an occasion of it, like. It’s thy twenty-eighth birthday, and as I am going to ease off a bit from today, I thought I would do something a bit special. Thou’st been down to the mill and looked at the letters, hasn’t ’a?”

The other nodded.

“Onything particular?”

“Nothing but what Blackburn can easily deal with.”

Old Amos Lancaster, or " Owd Amos," as he was commonly called in the town which lay about a mile away, and his grandson, Baxter Lancaster, lived alone together at Barons Court which had been owned by the Lancaster family for more than half a century. It was a fine old house, and had been built nearly three hundred years before by the great Baronoldswick family at a time when aristocrats counted for something in Lancashire. The Baronoldswick family had died out, however, and the family mansion had fallen into the hands of the Lancasters, who, although they did not claim an aristocratic descent, had been employers of labor for three generations.

Old Amos Lancaster had been regarded for many years as “a character.” He was a man of indomitable will, keen-minded, and impatient of opposition. Nevertheless, he was known as a just man, whose word was as good as his bond, and who had by his integrity and strength of mind made his name respected throughout the whole district. He was looked upon as a very rich man, too. Even in periods of bad trade, old Amos had “made brass,” and when many other manufacturers had not only failed to succeed in business, but had become bankrupt, he had gone from strength to strength.

There is a saying in Lancashire which is suggestive, “Clogs, carriages, clogs.” This saying tells its own story. I will not enlarge on it here; but certainly it was not true of the Lancasters. Old Amos’s grandfather had been a manufacturer in a small way, but Amos, who at the time of his father’s death was only twenty years of age, had by his keen foresight, his hard work, and his integrity caused what had been little to become great. Prosperity, moreover, had attended his efforts throughout the whole of his life, until now, when nearing eighty years of age, he was looked upon as " one of the soundest men in Lancashire."

Amos, however, had had his sorrows. When a little more than thirty years of age he had married, and two years after his marriage when life seemed a great promise of gladness because of the son who had been born to them, his wife died, leaving him desolate. But that was not all. In course of time, Amos’s son, whom he had called Baxter after his wife’s maiden name, also married.

But again trouble followed. When his grandson, Baxter, was only six years old, not only his son, Baxter, had died, but his wife had been taken

away by an epidemic of smallpox which was then raging in the district.

But "owd Amos" had shown little signs of grief. Indeed, except for his drawn features and the peculiar look in his eyes, no one would have known he had suffered loss. He never spoke a word about it even to his closest friends, but went on doggedly with his work, and seemed keener than ever to carry out the plans he had made.

His son's death had apparently made but one change in his life. For several years he had lived alone in Barons Court, but now he took his grandson, Baxter, to live with him, and for more than twenty years, with the exception of the time that Baxter had been at Harrow and Cambridge, they had lived together in the old house.

As soon as Baxter had left Cambridge, Amos had taken his grandson with him into the business; but strange to say—at least, many thought it strange—he did not make him a partner. Instead he set him to learn the details of every branch of the industry for which his business was famous.

"I don't believe in giving lads too much rope," he had remarked when his neighbors remonstrated with him.

Thus, at twenty-eight years of age Baxter was still a hireling in all that appertained to "The Lancaster Mills." He was an important hireling, no doubt. He had traveled nearly all over the world in connection with the business, and made important contracts; but he was not a partner. Old Amos controlled everything, and while he doubtless loved Baxter with an almost idolizing love, and while his pride in him was beyond words, he placed but little power in his hands.

But many believed that a change was coming. It had been announced that on the first day of June all Amos's work people—weavers, spinners, tacklers, foremen and managers—were to have a holiday. More than that, a great feast had been arranged at Barons Court, and on the morning on which this narrative opens, old Amos and his grandson sat together in the breakfast-room of the old house, while the former looked eagerly, and perhaps a little anxiously, at the sun which was doing its best to shine through a smoky sky.

"I have invited a sight a people here this afternoon," he said presently.

"So I judge," replied Baxter quietly, but with a laugh.

"Hast 'a 'eard owt?" he asked.

"It's the talk of the town," replied Baxter.

"Do you know what the people are saying?"



“They are saying that ’owd Amos has broken out in a new place,” replied the young man.

The old man chuckled, and seemed greatly pleased at the remark. “I’ve made big arrangements,” he admitted at length.

“So I gather from the world outside,” replied Baxter; “but you have told me nothing.”

Again Amos chuckled. “Nay, I’ve noan told thee onything,” he replied. “But I have it in my mind to do something big today.”

“Yes?” queried the young man, but he asked no question. He knew that if his grandfather wanted him to know anything he would tell him without any interrogation on his own part.

“I’ve made arrangements,” went on Amos, “with the biggest firm of caterers in Manchester to provide for two thousand people here today. Ay, and I have hoped that it would be fine, too! And it is! It’s just the day I wanted! Had it been rain the people would have had to go to the Town Hall and the Mechanics Institute; but that wouldn’t have been nearly so good. As it is, practically the whole of Baronstown will make their way here this afternoon. The park gates will be open to everybody, although I have only invited two thousand to feed, like— just our own people. More than that, I have invited all the bigwigs for miles around to come. They have accepted, too. Lord Tenbury and family are coming; so are the Cravens; so are the Thornleys; and what’s more,” and the old man lowered his voice as he spoke, “Sir William Templeton and Lady Templeton are coming, and they are bringing their daughter, Evelyn, with them. What do you think of that?”

Baxter did not reply, although the old man thought he noticed a flush mount his grandson’s cheek at the mention of Evelyn Templeton’s name.

The truth was, gossip had been rife concerning Baxter and Evelyn Templeton. Sir William Templeton was by no means a rich man, but he could claim to belong to the most exclusive aristocracy in England. Evelyn Templeton had been presented at Court, and poor though the baronet was, to be invited to Templeton Court was an honor which many coveted but few rejoiced in. Evelyn Templeton was spoken of as the most beautiful girl in Lancashire, and she was a welcome guest in the best houses in England. It was said, moreover, that Evelyn had behaved with more than usual graciousness to Baxter. More than once they had gone motoring together, while at the last County Ball she had chosen him from among many other aspirants for the first dance.

“What dost ’a think of Evelyn?” Amos asked, while his eyes rested keenly on his grandson.

“She is said to be very clever, very handsome, and very modern,” replied Baxter.

“Ay, but what dost tha think of her?”

“I am afraid it doesn’t matter what I think,” replied Baxter. “She scarcely belongs to my world. No doubt, however, she is a very fascinating girl.”

The old man watched his grandson steadily for a few seconds, and then went on: “Weel, we Lancasters have got on pretty well, and you are as good as the best of them. Always remember that, Baxter, my boy.”

Baxter did not speak.

“I am going to make one or two announcements this evening,” he said at length. “I have never said owt to anyone about what I am going to do, but this being a special occasion, I want to open my heart. Look here, Baxter,” and tears came into the old man’s eyes as he took his grandson’s hand, “you are all I’ve got in the world. As you know, my dear wife, your grandmother — Well, I shall never forget her. It’s many, many years ago now since I lost her, but no other woman has taken her place in my heart. Then, as you know, your own father and mother died when you were only just six years old, and I’ve had nobody but you all these years. Sometimes you have thought me a bit hard, haven’t you? Well, I have loved you all the time, lad. I am not one to talk much, but practically everything I have done has been done for you; every plan I have made has been made for you. And now I will tell you something more.”

Baxter looked at his grandfather steadily, and for the first time he noticed how old and withered he looked. It was true Amos Lancaster was hale and vigorous, but the marks of the years were upon him nevertheless.

“It can’t be so many years before I shall have to go from you, Baxter.”

“Don’t talk that way, grandfather.”

“But it can’t be!” and the old man spoke like one in a passion. “I am nearing eighty, lad, and the years tell. Not that I mean to die just yet,” he added almost angrily. “There is a lot of good stuff in me, and I always mean to count one. But never mind that. As I told you not long since, I am easing off from today, and I am going to make an announcement not only to the work people, but to our visitors, that you are an equal partner with me from today. I have spent a lot of time with the lawyers lately, and everything is ready for us to sign.”

“But, grandfather—!”

“Not a word, Baxter. It’s all settled. There isn’t a finer business in Lancashire than mine, and half of it is yours from today, while when I die it will be all yours. That’s the announcement I want to make this afternoon. People have wondered that I haven’t taken you into partnership before, and I confess I was tempted to do something of the sort when you were twenty-one; but that would have been foolish. You were just a silly lad then, while now you are a full-grown man. I am glad I waited, too. I always like to prove people before I give them my trust; and I have proved you, Baxter. That is the reason why I am announcing to the world today that you are equal with me in the business, and that you will come into everything I leave behind me. But that is not all,” and the young man noticed the peculiar accent in his grandfather’s voice as he spoke the last! words. “It’s this way, Baxter,” went on old Amos, “I am ambitious for you. It’s no use denying it; I am.”

“In what way, grandfather?” and there was a new interest in the young fellow’s voice.

“Well,” went on old Amos, “I am anxious that you should marry well.”

Baxter did not reply to this. Nevertheless, he looked at his grandfather curiously.

“Yes,” went on the old man, “I want you to marry well.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Mean by that! I want you to marry into an old family. I want you to take your place not only among people who have made brass, but among those who look down upon our class. Oh, I know what I am talking about! We could buy up Sir William Templeton ten times over, and then have a bit to spare! But remember this, Baxter, Sir William Templeton’s family were great people in Lancashire before the likes of us were ever heard of. They may have no brass, but they hob-nob with the big people in the land. They have influence in the House of Lords; in fact, they are friends of Royalty.”

“What are you driving at, grandfather?”

“Marry Evelyn Templeton,” said old Amos eagerly. “She is young, she is bonny, and—and who knows, before I die I may see you in the House of Lords!”

“Of course that’s all nonsense!” ejaculated Baxter.

“Why is it nonsense?”

“Because Evelyn Templeton wouldn’t look at me, and even if she would, her father would never consent to his only daughter marrying me.”

“Wouldn’t he?” laughed old Amos. “Look here, Baxter, I am not one who talks without my book, and I have had the name for a number of years for getting what I want. Sir William Templeton may be a great man as far as his name and family are concerned; he may have friends in the House of Lords; he may hobnob,” and here old Amos’s voice sunk into a whisper, “with the Duke of Birsty and with the Marquis of Milchester, but he is as poor as Job’s turkey, my lad, and he would do more than a bit to pay off his mortgages—and to have a bit of ready money in hand. Don’t you fear, Baxter,” and he looked at his grandson meaningly.

The young man’s eyes shone brightly. He saw the drift of his grandfather’s words, and he was, doubtless, somewhat carried away by them.

“I’ve kept my eyes and ears open,” went on Amos, “and while, of course, nothing is certain in this world, the heir of old Amos Lancaster is not to be sneezed at.”

“Do you mean to say you have spoken to Sir William Templeton?” and there was a strange look in Baxter’s eyes as he flashed the question at his grandfather.

“I have had several talks with Sir William Templeton during the last six months,” admitted old Amos.

“What did you say to him?”

“I am noan bound to tell you,” was the reply; “but I know that he thinks very highly of you. You see, Baxter, it is not as though you haven’t had advantages; you have. You are what they call in Sir William’s world an ‘old Public School boy’ and ‘a Varsity man.’ You spent three years at Trinity College, Cambridge, and you took a good degree there. Besides,” and he looked at his grandson proudly, “you are a well-set-up lad, and look as much an aristocrat as the best of them.”

They continued to talk on these lines for some time, the young man raising objections and the old man answering them, until at length a man who had come from Manchester that morning, sent in word that he desired to see Amos concerning the preparations which were going forward for that afternoon.

“Of course it’s impossible,” said Baxter to himself as his grandfather left the room. “The old chap is in his second childhood or he wouldn’t think of

such a thing.” Nevertheless, it was evident that he was, in no small degree, influenced by what had been said.

Baxter Lancaster might be called a good specimen of the young Lancashire business man. As we have hinted, he had had the advantages of a good education, and he had moved freely among the upper middle classes of the county. While going into business immediately after he had left Cambridge, and had, as a consequence, been brought into contact with all sides of Lancashire life, he was generally regarded as a “cut above” the ordinary young manufacturer. There was no suggestion of the Lancashire accent in his speech, while the years he had spent at Harrow and Cambridge had left their marks on him. He was more than ordinarily intelligent, too, and in addition to having taken a good classical degree he had read some of the best literature of the time. Altogether, to use an expression commonly heard in Baronstown, Baxter was “a well-set-up lad.”

Those who knew him best, however, did not regard him as a happy fellow. It was true he had had advantages far above the ordinary, while his prospects, especially considering the dark days through which, from a business standpoint, Lancashire was going, were more than ordinarily good. Old Amos Lancaster had his business managed so wisely, and established it on such broad foundations, that he knew but little of the slump which had submerged so many traders.

Baxter knew, therefore, that what the old man had told him about being able to buy up Sir William Templeton ten times over, and then have something to spare, were no idle words. In that respect the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places, and he had a goodly heritage.

Half an hour later Baxter was walking alone in the park. In spite of what his grandfather had told him about the preparations for the great feast that afternoon, he was but little excited by the thought of the great doings which would take place presently. Even the news that Evelyn Templeton would be among the visitors that day failed to arouse him. It was true he had been pleased when his grandfather told him that the young lady thought very highly of him, but his heart did not beat one whit the faster as he remembered that he would see her that afternoon.

“Twenty-eight today!” he said to himself as he stopped under the shade of a broad-spreading tree. “Twenty-eight today! I suppose I ought to be one of the happiest chaps in England, but I am dashed if I am!”

He called to mind what his grandfather had told him concerning his plans for his own welfare, and then he sighed. "After all, is it worth while?" he said.

The sun was shining brightly, and the sky overhead was as clear as it ever was in what was called "the smoke zone of Lancashire." The park around Barons Court stood high above the great manufacturing town of Baronstown which lay more than a mile away, but the air was saturated with the fumes emitted from a hundred factories. Still, for a Lancashire manufacturing district it was gloriously fine, and he knew he ought to be rejoicing in his surroundings. Nevertheless, there was a feeling of dissatisfaction in his heart.

"What was that I was reading about Thomas Hardy the other day?" he went on reflecting. "Just after he had written 'Jude the Obscure,' and when the whole country was praising his genius, he went out for a walk with a friend, and he said to the friend: 'Supposing you had the choice as to whether you would have been born, would you?' and when the friend retorted 'Would you?' Thomas Hardy replied 'No, a thousand times no.'"

Baxter laughed grimly as he recalled the story, and continued his walk across the park.

"I am twenty-eight years old today," he went on reflecting, "and my grandfather is giving a great feast to commemorate my birthday. I suppose I am one of the most fortunate chaps in Lancashire, and yet if I had my choice would I have been born—? But what rot I am thinking! Of course I would have been born! Of course it's a glad thing to live—! And yet—"

A few hours later Baxter Lancaster was welcoming the crowds of his own work people who came to visit them, and listening to their congratulations. Yes, the Lancashire people were kindly and warm-hearted, and doubtless most of them meant what they said when they told him that they wished him every happiness.

"I trust we shall always be good friends," he said to them again and again, and he there and then made up his mind that he would do everything in his power to avert anything like bad feeling between employer and employee. He threw off anything like restraint, too, and spoke cordially to everyone. Yes, it was good to live! Indeed, he felt so happy among the work people that he failed to notice a number of other visitors whom his grandfather had invited.

“Baxter! Baxter I this way!” he heard the old man say, and looking he saw several motorcars in the near distance.

A few minutes later he was walking alone with Evelyn Templeton.

“You ought to be very happy, Mr. Lancaster,” she said.

“Ought I? Well, I expect I am. It is glorious up here, isn’t it?”

The girl looked around her critically but appreciatingly. “Yes, it is glorious,” she replied, and then added: “What a pity.”

“What’s a pity?” he asked.

“Oh, nothing,” was her answer. “I forgot.”

“What have you forgotten?”

“Nothing worth mentioning,” was her reply. “You can’t see Baronstown from here for the smoke, can you?”

“No,” was his answer. “Although we are out in the country we are in the smoke zone... I wonder what she was going to say?” Baxter asked himself as he looked questioningly at her.

Had he known, he would perhaps have felt that she struck a painful chord, for her reflection was: “What a pity these parvenus live in the old home of the Baronoldswicks.”

Evelyn Templeton was doubtless a handsome girl, and apart from the name she bore, and the position which her father held in the county, she would attract attention anywhere. More than usually tall, she was what might be called statuesque, and in spite of her father’s comparative poverty she had had every advantage which art and culture could give her. Her best friends, however, said that Evelyn Templeton had never known what girlhood meant. Certainly there was no suggestion of abandon about her. She seemed, above everything, to be calculating and stately. She never laughed freely and unrestrainedly, neither did she seem to regard the crowd which had gathered with a kindly eye. Still, she was pleasant and gracious to Baxter, and if she thought of the differences in their birth and associations, she did not show it.

“Please, Mr. Baxter,” the young man heard someone say half an hour later.

He was still walking and talking with Evelyn Templeton, and on turning he saw a youth close behind them who had evidently followed them in order to gain their attention.

“Yes, what is it, William John?” he asked, turning to the youth.

“Your grandfather wants you,” was the reply. “He told me to tell you to come at once. He is waiting to make a speech, and he says you must be there.”

Baxter laughed as he led the girl in the direction of the house where a platform had been erected on which a number of the leading families of the district were seated, while around stood a crowd of eager listeners.

“Baxter, come up here, and bring Miss Templeton with you.”

It was his grandfather’s voice, and he noted his accents of pride.

“Will you come?” he said to Evelyn Templeton.

The girl smiled graciously, and a minute later they, amidst the cheers of the crowd, had climbed on to the platform and were looking across the sea of faces beneath them.

It was then that Baxter Lancaster became almost oblivious to the fact that Evelyn Templeton was by his side, and that for nearly an hour he had been trying in various ways to find out whether there was any suggestion of truth in what his grandfather had told him.

The reason for this can quickly be told, and as it is connected with our story it had better be told at once.

A few months before an old Presbyterian minister in the town had lost his wife, and a little later it was rumored among the people that his own sister was coming to, as far as possible, fill his wife’s place. This Presbyterian minister hailed originally from Scotland, and rejoiced in the name of Alexander McAlpine. His sister, however, had married an Englishman who, shortly before Mr. McAlpine had lost his wife, had died leaving one daughter, a girl about nineteen years of age, behind him. This daughter had accompanied her mother to Baronstown, and who, as Mr. McAlpine repeatedly stated, had renewed his own youth.

It was this girl’s face that Baxter Lancaster saw as he mounted the platform that day.

As old Amos Lancaster had repeatedly said, he determined to make a great thing of the fête which was to celebrate his grandson’s twenty-eighth birthday. For that reason he had invited, in addition to his own work people and their families, not only the local gentry, but the clergy and ministers of all denominations. This had led not only to Mr. McAlpine being present, but his sister who had come to keep house for him, as well as her daughter Peggy.



Baxter Lancaster had met Peggy Edgecumbe several times, and had been very much attracted by this laughing-eyed girl who, while being regarded as a great deal of a hoyden, was at the same time a thoughtful and cultured girl.

But there was more than that. Standing by her side was a young Congregational minister who had a few months before come to Baronstown, and who, if report spoke truly, ministered to a small but select congregation of the oldest Nonconformist families for miles around.

Hitherto Baxter had known but little, and cared less, about this young Nonconformist minister. For that matter he had given not only ministers, but churches of every sort a wide berth, and had repudiated all connection with them. It was true that old Amos called himself a member of “th ’owd body,” meaning the Wesleyan Methodist Church, but he had paid little or no attention to Baxter’s religious whereabouts, and the young man had, as a consequence, grown up largely indifferent to, if not opposed to, any form of religious faith.

But today everything became different. He thought he saw in the young Congregational minister’s eyes and on his eager face that which, at any rate for the moment, caused a mad feeling of jealousy to surge up within him; As we have said, he knew little or nothing about Stephen Wallace, the young Congregational minister, but from that moment he saw in him a rival, and he determined that before the sun went down that day he would find a means of speaking to Peggy Edgecumbe.

## 2. Baxter's Love-making

OF COURSE neither old Amos Lancaster nor any who were on the platform that day, guessed Baxter's feelings. Indeed, he could scarcely realize them himself. While he had regarded Peggy Edgecumbe as a more than ordinarily attractive and good-looking girl, he had never once thought of falling in love with her. Neither did anyone in that vast crowd ever for a moment associate him with her.

More than that, old Amos Lancaster had never dreamed of such a possibility. For that matter, it was doubtful whether he knew her even by sight. All his thoughts had been centered upon Evelyn Templeton. He remembered what he had said to his grandson that morning about her, and he had watched them as they walked away side by side across the park. Yes, the thought of their "making a match of it" pleased the old man wonderfully. In spite of the fact that he boasted of his democratic feelings and repeatedly declared that he thought "nowt of owd families and such-like," he was at heart a snob. He remembered, too, that while people bearing old names made use of rich parvenus, they really disliked and despised them. Hence when he saw the apparent friendliness between his grandson and Evelyn Templeton, he rejoiced beyond measure. He thought of the time when the boy he so much loved should hold up his head among people who would look down upon the likes of "owd Amos Lancaster."

The people cheered wildly as Amos made his way to the front of the platform. Of course, they knew nothing of what had passed between grandfather and grandson that day, but they gave a pretty correct guess at what was to take place. Not altogether so, however.

"My dear friends," the old man commenced. "I think this is the proudest day of my life. Today is my grandson, Baxter's twenty-eighth birthday. You all know that, don't you?"

There was great cheering at this, and Baxter felt a kind of pride that not only Evelyn Templeton, but Peggy Edgecumbe should know how he was regarded by the people.

“But that’s not all I want to say,” went on old Amos, after he had enlarged on this theme. “Up to now, while the boy has always lived with me, and while I have always looked upon him as my heir, I have kept him in the background. Some of you have thought that I haven’t been fair to him in doing this. You have said that as he is my grandson he should have family privileges. Weel, I have noan thought so. I have always said that it is a bad thing to give lads too much brass, and that no man should have brass until he knew how to mak’ it. Onyhow, Baxter knows how to mak’ it, and from this day he goes half shares with me.”

There was another great burst of cheering at this, and much excitement prevailed. For while all expected an announcement of this sort would be made, yet now that it was made it caused much stir and commotion.

“But that is not all,” went on the old man. “I am nearly eighty, and although I don’t mean to die just yet, I can’t in the course of nature last many years longer. That’s why I should like to see Baxter wed before many months are gone. I’ve been looking around trying to pick out a lass for him, and I think I have done it... No, I’m noan going to tell you who she is, although Baxter knows.”

Another burst of cheering followed Amos’s words, while much excitement prevailed.

“Yes, I see how you are talking,” laughed the old man, "and you are wondering if you know the lass I am thinking about. Weel you don’t, and, as far as I know, she has not the slightest idea herself; but when she does know, I hope she’ll noan be silly. For let me tell you this, my Baxter is a good chance. Ay, he is. A nicer, straighter lad never lived than Baxter. As for brass, he can hold up his head with the best, and not one of these gentry here on this platform would have any need to be ashamed of him.

“Now that’s all I’ve got to say, for I hate long speeches. Perhaps when Baxter gets up to say a few words to you he will promise that within a week from now he will tell you the name of the lady who is to be his bride. I shall be very much disappointed if he doesn’t.”

When Baxter stepped to the front of the platform after his grandfather’s speech he was, as may be imagined, met with great cheering. For one thing, Amos had whetted the appetites of the people. He had spoken mysteriously about some bride that he and Baxter had agreed upon, and many wondered who she might be. They also hoped that before the day was over they would

know the name of this lady who would take up her residence at Barons Court.

But this was not the only cause of enthusiasm. Baxter was a Baronstown boy. Many had known him all his life, and being servants of "the firm," they regarded him with peculiar interest. More than that, they liked him. While always a somewhat reserved lad, he was, nevertheless, looked upon as honest and straightforward, and this greatly appealed to Lancashire people.

"He's a fine lad," many remarked, as taking off his hat " the summer breeze played with the brown locks which lay on his broad forehead.

"Ay, 'ee is, an' rare an' good-looking, too. I wonder who's the lass 'ee's going to marry?"

"Maybe Sir William Templeton's lass."

"Shh, man! You are speaking loud enough for Sir William to hear, and maybe he wouldn't like it."

"I'd rather he'd marry one of our own people. No doubt Miss Templeton is a fine lady, but she's noan our sort."

Baxter's speech did not altogether please his listeners. Indeed, the general verdict when he had finished was that it was very tame.

"The lad doesn't look well," one remarked. "See how pale he is!"

"Weel, and so would you be if you had to mak' a speech before this crowd."

"Onyhow, he hasn't fulfilled his grandfather's promise in naming the lady he is going to marry."

"Nay, Baxter is noan that sort. Besides, he may not have asked her, and he couldn't give her name until she had said yes."

"She'd say yes right eno', no matter who she may be," someone ventured. "Baxter's fortune will be a long way up in six figures, it may be seven, and lasses will noan turn a cold shoulder to ony lad who can claim a fortune like that."

Whether his speech pleased the people or not, however, cheer after cheer greeted him as he sat down, while Evelyn Templeton, who made room for him at her side, congratulated him with a winsome smile. "I didn't know you were such an orator, Mr. Lancaster," she said.

"Ay, he spoke grandly, didn't he?" broke in old Amos, who had been eagerly listening. "But tha didn't do what I meant tha to do, lad."

"How is that, Mr. Lancaster?" asked the girl.

“He’s noan told the name of the lass I should like him to wed,” replied the old man.

“Perhaps he can’t get her to say yes,” the girl said, and Amos could not help noting the flush on her cheek.

“Look here,” cried the old man, and he spoke with all the bluntness for which he was noted. “Supposing the lass I wanted him to marry were listening to me at this very moment; do you think she would say yes?”

Amos was not noted for finesse in his speech, and many there were who had been offended by his bluntness; but the old man could not help noting that the girl to whom he spoke showed no signs of anger. Instead, she answered his questions by a laughing repartee, and then moved aside while others came to congratulate Baxter on his speech.

It is not my purpose to describe in detail the events of that day. I have since been told that it was regarded as the greatest success ever known in Baronstown, but perhaps there is not much importance to be attached to that. The occasion was well nigh unique, and it was natural that the people should be enthusiastic. Moreover, almost every form of amusement was provided, and the day being gloriously fine, nothing seemed to mar the enjoyment of the visitors.

Nevertheless, the young man whose twenty-eighth birthday was the occasion for the feast did not seem happy. Instead he looked like one sad and distrait. More than once he failed to notice when he was spoken to, and although he afterwards apologized most profusely for his apparent lack of attention, people drew curious conclusions.

“What’s the matter with tha, lad?” old Amos asked as darkness began to fall. “Thou art as sad as a badly made Yorkshire pudding. Why is it?”

“In what way am I sad?” asked Baxter.

“Ast ’a spoken to Evelyn?” Amos asked.

“No.”

“But tha shouldst, lad. She is expecting it.”

“How do you know?”

“Do you tak’ me for a fool? Do you think I don’t know when a lass is waiting for a lad to speak to her? Tha wilt be too late if tha doesn’t make haste. Make hay while the sun shines, lad.”

In spite of several similar appeals, however, Baxter allowed Evelyn Templeton to leave Barons Court that night without asking her the question which his grandfather wanted him to ask. Indeed, the girl looked strangely

at him as she bade him good night, while her father and mother during their journey from Barons Court to Templeton Court wondered whether she and Baxter had quarreled.

After what was called the gentry had nearly all left, Baxter was seen roaming apparently aimlessly around. Yet all the while he was eagerly seeking someone.

Directly after he had finished his speech, his attention, as we have seen, was claimed by Evelyn Templeton, and directly afterwards, when he found himself at liberty, he looked for Peggy Edgecumbe; but she was nowhere visible. Neither, for that matter, was Stephen Wallace, and Baxter could not help coming to the conclusion that they had gone away together.

Just after the departure of Lord Tenbury's car, however, Baxter's heart gave a wild leap, for coming away from what was called the "Maze," which was situated in a coppice close beside the house, he saw Stephen Wallace and Peggy Edgecumbe. As far as he could judge, both looked excited, but what was the cause of the excitement he had no idea. He watched them closely, however, and, to his delight, he saw that Stephen Wallace went away by himself.

Making his way to the girl's side, he saw that she was preparing to leave. "I must go at once," he heard her say to someone. "How long is it since my mother and uncle left? Half an hour? Then I mustn't wait another minute."

He could not help noticing the excitement in the girl's voice, but determining to make the most of the chance which was offered him, he hastened to speak to her. "Surely you are not leaving us, Miss Edgecumbe?" he protested.

"Yes, Mr. Lancaster. I ought to have gone before, but I did not know my mother and uncle were leaving so soon. I am afraid the last char-a-banc has gone, too. Two were ordered to take people to our side of the town, and it was arranged that both of them should leave at ten o'clock. It is a good deal after that now."

"Please don't let that bother you," and there was a laugh in Baxter's voice. "I will motor you over presently, but, meanwhile, come into the house and have some refreshments."

"I don't think I'd better," replied the girl hesitatingly.

"But you must," urged Baxter. "I have a special reason for saying this."

"Special reason?" she repeated.

“I want to say something to you—to tell you something. Please don’t disappoint me.”

Their eyes met. His, wistful, eager, longing. Hers, sparkling with the joy of life and abundant health, while at the same time thoughtful and with a suggestion of unsatisfied longing.

She did not move away from him. In spite of what she had said about hurrying home, she lingered by his side.

“Miss Edgecumbe,” said Baxter, “there is still a crowd here. Can’t we go a little farther away from the house where it will be quieter?”

“No, no,” the girl said. “I really must go back home.”

“But why? It will take your mother and uncle at least an hour to get home by that rumbling old conveyance, while I can run you over in ten minutes with the car. It is only about three miles.”

“Good night, Mr. Lancaster. Please let me go.”

The reason for her last words was that Baxter had caught her hand and was holding it feverishly.

“I can’t let you go yet,” he persisted. “At least, you must hear what I have to tell you first.”

“But what do you want to tell me? Is it that you are engaged to be married?”

“I engaged to be married?”

“Yes—to Miss Templeton, you know. Everyone has been talking about it. We all saw, or thought we saw, the drift of what your grandfather said.”

“No, I am not engaged to Miss Templeton,” and Baxter spoke hastily.

“She hasn’t said no, has she? Oh, please forgive me, I ought not to have said that; but everyone has been talking about it.”

“I haven’t asked her,” replied Baxter. “Do you know why?”

Perhaps there was something coquettish in her voice as she made answer. At any rate, her reply made Baxter’s heart leap with joy, and caused him to forget what had been troubling him for hours. “Why?” asked the girl. “Is there someone else?”

“Of course there is someone else. You know that.”

“I, Mr. Lancaster?”

“Yes, you. Do you know, I have never had such a ghastly day in my life, although my grandfather wanted to make it the happiest day I had ever known.”

“And hasn’t it been?”

“How could it be when I saw you with that fellow Wallace.”

“Mr. Lancaster!” cried the girl in tones of indignation.

“Oh, I know it is madness for me to speak like that, but I can’t help myself. Yes, I may as well be frank; my grandfather wants me to marry Miss Templeton, and, and—I can’t. Even if she would have me—and I don’t suppose she would—I couldn’t. Do you know why? It’s because you are the only girl I ever cared for! Just as I was helping her on to the platform this afternoon I saw you, and from that moment there was no one else in the world for me; only I was jealous. You were laughing and talking with that fellow Wallace; and—and—”

Could Baxter have seen her face at that moment he would have known that she had become as pale as death, while her eyes burned with an unearthly light. But he could not see her. Night had now fallen, and although the pale crescent of the new moon shone brightly, he could not see that her face had become like marble. And yet he felt that something was wrong. He had hoped with a great hope that she would respond eagerly to his confession, instead of which she seemed to repel him.

They had by this time moved away from the crowd, and hidden beneath the broad branches of an old tree in the park, they were unnoticed.

“Peggy,” persisted Baxter, “won’t you speak to me?”

The girl answered never a word.

’Won’t you speak to me?’ he asked again.

“No,” she replied.

To Baxter there was something cold and metallic in her voice. It did not seem like Peggy at all. Hitherto when they had talked together she had spoken freely and frankly, and he had looked upon her as a laughter loving girl whose very presence created sunshine. Now, however, she appeared to have changed. Although he could not see her, he knew her face had become stern; that there was something in her heart which almost made him fear.

“Have you nothing to say to me, Peggy?—I may call you Peggy, mayn’t I?”

“No,” she replied again.

“But why? Don’t you care for me?”

“Yes, I think I do,” she replied, and there was a strange calmness in her voice. “For that matter,” she went on, “I think I like you very much; but I can’t do what you ask.”



“But if you like me,” and hope had come back to his eyes again, “what is there to keep you from marrying me?”

“It is very hard to tell you,” she replied after being silent for a few seconds. “But I mean it.”

This was followed by another long silence. Then she went on: “You promised to drive me home just now, Mr. Lancaster. I am sorry to bother you, but could you do it right away? I want to leave; I really do.”

“I don’t understand you,” persisted the young man. “I really mean what I say. You believe that, don’t you.”

“Yes, I am sure you do.”

“Then why do you refuse me?”

“Because—because I can’t help myself! The very thought of it frightens me!”

“But why? You say you like me, and you have nothing against me personally, have you?”

“Yes—that’s it!” the girl gasped as though he had helped her to find a reason for her refusing him.

“But what have you against me? I am not such a bad sort of a fellow, and, really, I have gone fairly straight.”

“It isn’t that!” cried the girl. “From what I know of you— But there I I can’t, I really can’t!”

“Anyhow, I think I have a right to know why,” he said presently. “Is—is it because my grandfather wants me to marry someone else?”

“No. Of course, if I thought of marrying you, I should be sorry that I was not your grandfather’s choice as well as yours, but that would not affect my decision. Do you want me to speak quite frankly?”

“Of course I do.”

“Then you are not the kind of man I could marry.”

“Why?” and by this time a certain amount of indignation had crept into his voice. He felt like defending himself, too. Although regarded as a modest fellow, he still had a good opinion of Baxter Lancaster, and remembering what had been said about him that very day, and remembering, too, that he would be in the future one of the richest young men in Lancashire, that home of great fortunes, he could not help feeling chagrined at being dismissed so lightly.

Again she was silent for a few seconds, and Baxter, fretting at her refusal and impatient at her silence, repeated his question. “Why am I not the kind

of man you would like to marry?"

"Because," replied the girl—" Oh, I know I must seem an awful prig in saying what I am obliged to say, but since I came to Baronstown I have learnt a lot."

"Learnt a lot! I don't understand."

"I used not to think about these things," cried the girl, "but my uncle—you don't know him, do you?"

"I know him by sight, of course."

"But you have never heard him preach? You have never seen into his heart?"

"I never hear anyone preach," replied Baxter. "I am not that sort of fellow."

"That's it! That's it!" cried the girl.

"What's it?"

"Everything is so different since I have known my uncle," she confessed. "I have only been in Baronstown a few months, but it has changed my whole outlook on life. His wife, my aunt, had only lately died when mother and I came, and he was stricken with grief. And yet it was not ordinary grief. His heart was almost breaking with sorrow, and yet I never knew a man so happy. Have I made you understand? To him my aunt isn't dead at all; she is waiting for him somewhere until his time comes to join her. More than that, he is sure that God is watching over him; sure that everything is working together for good; sure that out of the darkness will come light."

Baxter laughed. "You must excuse me if I cannot go into rhapsodies over what you have said," he replied. "Of course I believe your uncle to be a very good man. As I said, I have never heard him preach. For that matter I never hear anyone preach. I never go to church, and if ever I had any faith in what you say your uncle believes in so tenaciously, it left me years ago. In fact, I believe nothing of that sort."

"That's where it is," cried the girl; "neither do I. And I couldn't marry a man who, like myself, is a blank materialist."

"But, Peggy," and Baxter spoke impatiently, "do be sensible, and don't talk nonsense!"

"I am sure it's not nonsense," cried the girl. "It's the most tremendous fact in life."

"If such thoughts give you any comfort, by all means think them," was Baxter's reply. "To me they are nothing but relics of a worn-out

superstition; but I would not try to hinder you from believing. What I want you to realize is that my heart has gone out to you, in a great love; and I want you to be my wife.”

“How long will you love me?” broke in the girl.

“As long as I live,” replied Baxter fervently.

“And how long will that be?” There was a new tone in her voice as she asked the question.

“We Lancasters are a fairly long-lived race,” replied Baxter in tones of satisfaction. “My old grandfather is nearly eighty, and he looks good for several years yet. I may have sixty more years of life, and I shall love you at the end of life as much as I love you now.”

“And is that all?” cried the girl.

“That all! I don’t understand. Of course I am only mortal.”

“Yes, that’s it I And do you think I could be satisfied with the love of a lifetime? Do you think I could be satisfied with the love of a lump of clay? For that is all your love is, Mr. Lancaster.”

“But, my dear girl, what do you want?” asked Baxter, and the question passed his lips almost before he realized what he was saying.

“Want?” cried the girl. “My uncle has made me feel that I am more than a lump of clay, and yet in a way I can’t realize it. He has caused me to have unutterable longings, and yet, while I have a feeling that those longings may be realized, everything seems to mock me. I think,” and a far-off look came into her eyes, “I think I want God!”

“God I What is God?” asked Baxter. “God is intangible, uncertain. There may be a God; I don’t know. Sometimes I think there may be, and sometimes I am just as sure that He doesn’t exist. But I exist, Peggy, and I will give you all I have and am.”

“Will you please take me home, Mr. Lancaster?” the girl said after a long, long silence.

“Not before I have your promise,” was Baxter’s reply. In spite of the fact that she had made him realize that there were depths in her nature which he had hitherto never suspected, he could not help being impatient.

“Then good night,” said the girl.

She rushed away from him as she spoke, and in a few seconds was lost to sight.

“I am a fool! I am a clown!” cried Baxter as he rushed to follow her. “What must she think of me?”

Rapidly as he went, however, he did not see her again that night. Angry with himself for letting her go out of his sight, he tried to find her; but in vain; and when at length he came near the house again it was only to find the young Congregational minister standing near the front door. "Have you by any chance seen Miss Edgecumbe?" he asked Stephen Wallace.

"Yes, I saw her a minute ago," replied the young man. "She has gone home."

"But I promised to drive her!"

Wallace looked at him inquiringly. He could not understand his panting breath, and the look of excitement in his eyes. "The Grimshaw car was just driving away as she came up," Wallace told him, "and they gave her a lift."

"I quite meant to have driven her home," Baxter explained a minute later. "We were having an important discussion, too. Still, we must finish it another time."

A sudden thought struck him. He had scarcely ever spoken to Wallace before, but now he was eager to know him better.

"The people are nearly all gone, Mr. Wallace," he said. "There, I believe that is the last conveyance going out of the lodge gates."

"Well, you have had a wonderful day! I should think you must be very happy, Mr. Lancaster," ventured the young minister.

"Should you? By the way, are you in a hurry to get home?"

"Oh no. My old housekeeper will not wait up for me, and I have my latch-key."

"Then come in with me and have a glass of wine. There is plenty of time for a chat before going to bed."

"You will think it very strange, Mr. Lancaster, but I never drank wine in my life. All the same, I shall be glad of a chat. Is anything the matter with you?"

"Why should you ask?"

"Because—I dare say it is impertinence on my part to say so—you look as though you are disappointed with today."

"Not a bit of it!" replied Baxter with a forced laugh. "But I'm glad you can come in for a few minutes; I want to ask you something."

"Yes," replied Wallace, "what do you want to ask me?"

Baxter waited for some time before speaking.

"I suppose," he said at length, "being a parson, you are a religious kind of chap? Has it any meaning to you? Forgive me if I appear rude—I don't

mean to be—but has it?”

“Has it any meaning to me?” repeated Wallace in astonishment.

“Yes. You are not offended, are you?”

He led the way into the house as he spoke, and entering a comfortable, homey room, he pointed to a Chair. “You look surprised,” he ventured.

“I am rather,” replied Wallace. “To ask a man— a parson—whether his faith has any meaning to him or not seems so strange that I can hardly believe you meant it.”

“Oh, but I did! Take one of these, will you?” and he opened a box of cigars and placed it before his guest.

### 3. Stephen Wallace's Call

"YOU DON'T MIND my being absolutely frank, do you?" continued Baxter after a somewhat awkward silence. "It's years since I spoke to anyone about such things, and I really want to know."

"To know what?" and the young minister looked at him wonderingly.

"Whether what you preach has any real meaning to you."

"Why, hasn't it to you?"

"Not a bit," replied Baxter. "I never go to Church, except for a wedding or a funeral, and then everything of that sort seems so utterly unreal that it makes no appeal to me. I believe my grandfather regards himself as a member of Wesley Chapel, although he never goes there.

Whether he has any faith in religion or not, I am not sure. Certainly he has never troubled me about it. As I told you just now, I know nothing of churches, and, as far as I can see, even those who are supposed to know something about them are drifting away from them. Anyhow, forgive me if I have offended you, but I had a reason for asking the question."

"Oh, you have not offended me in the least," replied Wallace. "Your question appeared strange; that was all. Of course my religion means everything to me."

"Would you mind being a little more explicit?"

"Ask me what you want to know, and I will tell you."

"Well, then," and Baxter, having settled himself comfortably in a chair opposite the young minister, began to speak freely. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Wallace," he said, "I suppose I am what you might call a kind of pagan. Of course, during the years I was at school and at Cambridge I went to chapel, and that kind of thing, but it had no more meaning to me than the story of Cinderella; then, since I graduated, life has been so full of other things that there has seemed no room for it. Besides, what's the need of it?"

"What's the need of it?"

"Yes, what's the need of it? I can't see any."

"But you don't mean that?"

“I certainly do.”

Wallace had forgotten to light his cigar. Looking at the young man whose twenty-eighth birthday had been celebrated that day, and who was spoken of as one of the best educated young men in Baronstown, he naturally felt interested. Was Baxter Lancaster typical of thousands of young men who lived in the district and who had no interest in the things which were to him vital and all important?

“You say you have no use for religion?” he asked.

“Not a bit. It doesn’t touch me in any way.”

“Is that true?” asked Wallace, looking at him keenly. “Please forgive me, but I can’t think you understand what you are saying. Religion has so entered into the warp and woof of our lives that we can’t be uninfluenced by it.”

“I don’t think I follow you,” replied Baxter.

“I mean this,” and the young minister spoke earnestly. “You simply can’t get away from Christianity. The ethics of Baronstown, the ethics on which you are supposed to conduct your business life have their roots in our faith.”

“Yes, if you put it that way,” replied Baxter thoughtfully, “I suppose I must admit it. At the same time, it seems to me that ethics can be altogether dissociated from what we call religion. Of course it is a commonplace of all religions that to be truthful is better than to lie, and that to be honest is better than to steal. At least, these things are believed in as a theory. But must not one get deeper? What, after all, is religion?”

“The foundation of all religion,” replied Wallace, “in fact its very center and circumference, is the belief in what we call God.”

Baxter felt as though someone had stabbed him. Like lightning his mind flashed back to an hour or so before as, when talking with Peggy Edgecumbe, he remembered the girl saying: “I think I want God.”

But he gave no sign of what he felt to the man opposite him. “Theoretically, I suppose what you say is true,” he said. “But, after all, what does it amount to? I suppose that at the back of all life’s phenomena is an Eternal Something; but what that Something is, we don’t know. To Herbert Spencer it was an Eternal force; to others it’s an incomprehensible abstraction.”

“And to others,” added Wallace, “it’s the great Father Spirit who is caring for all our lives, who is undying Love, who is Infinite Goodness,

who is Infinite Mercy—”

“And do you believe that?” interposed Baxter, and there was a touch of mockery in his voice.

“I do,” replied the other, “and my belief means everything to me.”

“Means everything! Can you explain that?”

“It is too big to explain, but it is true all the same. Because I believe in God—the God whom Jesus Christ has revealed—life has new hopes, new meanings to me. Because I believe in God, death is not something to shudder at; it is the open door to eternal life.”

“And you really mean that?”

“I am sure of it,” replied Wallace.

“Sure?”

“Yes, sure. It came to me years ago as the greatest fact in life.”

“What came to you?” asked Baxter.

“The fact of God; the fact of His infinite love and mercy and goodness; the fact of His Divine Providence; the fact of another life beyond, which will be the fulfillment of this life. But for that everything would mock me; but for that I should have no interest in living, or, at least, my interest in life would be narrowed down to something that meant hoping and striving and an ending in nothing.”

Baxter did not reply for a few seconds; instead his mind flashed back to the time when he had been with Peggy Edgecumbe. He had asked her to be his wife; he had told her that he loved her; he had pleaded with her to link her life with his, and he had promised that he would give her all he possessed. But she had refused him, and there was something like scorn and indignation in her refusal.

Why had she refused him?

In the eyes of the world he was what was called “a good chance.” His grandfather had that day openly declared that he was taken into half-partnership with himself, and he was sufficiently conversant with old Amos Lancaster’s business to know that, in spite of bad trade, he was nearly, if not quite, a millionaire. He knew, too, that he was spoken of as a fitting husband for one of the great ladies in the district; and yet this girl, Peggy Edgecumbe, had refused him. Moreover, when he had asked her to give him her reasons for doing so she had told him that, while she liked him, he was not the man she could accept for a husband.



What did it mean? Were his first thoughts about, Stephen Wallace founded upon fact? Was the reason that she had refused him in some way connected with this man?

“Mr. Wallace,” he asked, “I saw you talking with Miss Edgecumbe this afternoon. What did you think of her?”

He felt angry with himself for not being more adroit in his conversation. He knew he could have introduced Peggy’s name more naturally.

“I do not know much of her,” replied Wallace. “She came into the town just as I did. Her aunt, Mrs. McAlpine, had just died, leaving the old doctor alone. Then she % and her mother came to live with him, and although the old doctor and I are very friendly, and I often go to see him, I scarcely ever meet her. She is, however, a very fascinating and handsome girl.”

“A bit of a hoyden, isn’t she?” asked Baxter.

“Hoyden! What do you mean?”

“I am not much of a woman’s man,” he replied, “but she has struck me as being very unconventional.”

“Do you know her well?” asked Wallace.

“No, I have met her only a few times. I should like to know her better,” he added.

The young minister looked at him keenly, but did not say another word; perhaps he did not think it wise to do so.

For more than a minute there was a silence between them. Somehow each felt that he had entered a realm where words could not be uttered easily. Presently, however, Baxter started to his feet. “Wallace,” he said—“you will forgive me for dropping the Mister. I don’t know you well, but I would like to know you better, and —couldn’t we drop the Mister, both of us?” and he held out his hand as he spoke.

“I’d love to,” replied Wallace, grasping his hand eagerly.

There was a strange look in Baxter Lancaster’s eyes as he felt the pressure of the other’s hand. Perhaps he did not realize it to the full, but his nature was being aroused to its depths. In a way he could not understand his whole life was invested by a new meaning. Perhaps ,\_ there was reason for this. He had that day celebrated his twenty-eighth birthday. It had also been announced by his grandfather that he would hold a prominent position in one of the most important firms of manufacturers in Lancashire. Added to that, his grandfather had given him hints about what he hoped would be the future of his life, which could not help making him thoughtful.

He did not know why it was, but he did not seem quite master of himself, and although his acquaintance with Stephen Wallace was but slight, he felt a strong desire to open his heart to him. That was why, under the influence of the hour, he had practically offered him his friendship, and had asked that formalities might be discontinued between them.

“Wallace,” he said, “you don’t mind my speaking freely, do you?”

“Not a bit,” replied the other. “I hope you will.”

“Then would you mind telling me about yourself? I know the question is a strange one, but I have my reasons for it, and I will tell you about them presently.”

“There is practically nothing to tell,” replied Wallace.

“Tell me why you became a parson,” replied the other eagerly. “I’d like to know, I really would.”

“Why?”

“Because of what you told me just now. You struck a note which is not often struck, and I, although you may not think so, am interested.”

“As to that,” replied Wallace, “everything can be quickly told. As my name indicates, I come of an old Scotch family, and my father and mother, both of them, live in Edinburgh. I graduated at the University there, and then—well, to tell you the truth, there came a kind of crisis in my life. Both my father’s and my mother’s people wanted me to go into business, and they offered me means whereby I could, if I had accepted, have become a rich man in a few years. I was strongly tempted to accept the offer which was made me, too.”

“Why didn’t you?” asked Baxter.

“Because at that time a tremendous thing happened to me.”

“Do you feel like telling me what it was?”

“Yes, I do.’ I don’t know why I should want to tell you, but I do. I had been dining with some of my father’s people up in the direction of Waverley Station, and I was on my way home. As I think I told you, I had just graduated at the University, and I had practically decided on a scholastic career. My visit to my father’s people that night, however, had practically made me alter my decision. As I told you, I was on my way home, having practically made up my mind to accept the offer which was made me, and embark upon a commercial career.”

Stephen Wallace lay back in his chair as he spoke, while a faraway look came into his eyes. For the time, at all events, his mind did not appear to be

in the town of Baronstown.

"I was passing down the street, and had just reached the University Club," he continued, "when I stopped suddenly. Something, I do not know what it was, seemed to stand in my way." Then it seemed to me as though someone spoke to me, although I cannot remember distinguishing any voice. 'Stephen Wallace,' something or somebody said to me, 'you have tonight practically made up your mind to accept a very promising position under a great firm, whereby you hope soon to become a rich man. You must not do it.'"

"As I said, I stopped in the street and looked around me. There was nothing to be seen, and yet in a way I heard the voice as plainly as I have heard yours this evening."

"Was it late? Had you been dining unusually well?" asked Baxter incredulously.

"Yes, it was late—midnight, in fact. As for dining unusually well, I told you some time ago that I was an abstainer, and, therefore—"

"Forgive me," cried Baxter. "Please go on!"

"In a way it is hard to go on," replied the other; "and yet it isn't. I stood in the middle of the street, and looked around me. On the one hand was the University Club; down in the valley near by was the railway, while in the distance were the hills around Holyrood. 'What must I do?' I said aloud. 'You must give up all thoughts of becoming a rich man,' was the reply I heard. 'You must give your life to telling the world about Me.'

"I did not ask who 'Me' was; there seemed no need. I knew. I had for weeks been reading about the historical basis of the life and death of Jesus Christ, and I remembered having a discussion with one of the professors about this subject. I remembered, too, that the professor had said that the proofs of the life and work of Jesus, as well as His death and resurrection, were as well attested as that of any other historical fact.

"At the time the professor spoke to me," the young minister went on, "his words conveyed but little meaning to me, but that night, in the heart of that great city, something opened my eyes. What it was I do not know, but Jesus Christ became as real to me as the objects by which I was surrounded. I had no more doubt of His existence or His purposes towards me than I had of my own existence.

"'You must not be a business man,' something said to me. 'You must spend your life telling the world about Me.'"

“And is that all?” asked Baxter after Wallace had been silent for some time.

“All!” asked the young minister. “What could I want more?”

“And what did you do?”

“I went home, and on the following morning told my father and mother what I meant to be. Why I should become a Congregational minister,” he added, “I don’t know. As you may be aware, the Church of Scotland is Presbyterian, and all my people belong to that body. But, as it seems to me, I drifted into a Congregational College, and here I am.”

“And are you happy—satisfied?” asked Baxter.

Wallace leapt to his feet like a man in a passion. “Happy! satisfied!” he cried. “No! How can I be satisfied when I am a failure?”

“Are you a failure?”

Wallace took two or three turns around the room, and then stopped suddenly before Baxter and said: “You should not have asked me to tell you about myself, and you’ve no one to blame but yourself for being bored with my story. Why I was invited to St. George’s Chapel at Baronstown, or why I should have been led to accept the invitation, I don’t know. But there’s the fact. I have been here nearly a year now, and, as far as I can see, I have been beating the air ever since I came.”

“And do you regret coming?”

“No, and that is what I can’t understand,” replied Wallace. “For although I have been a miserable failure, I have been, in a way, glad I came. Everything is different from what I hoped and expected. During the time I was at the Theological College I had all sorts of dreams about the work I was going to do and the success I was going to have. I pictured myself changing the lives of thousands, and of altering the outlook of whole communities. But nothing of this sort came to pass. When the principal of the college told me of the request that I should preach for three Sundays in an empty church in a dirty Lancashire town, I laughed at the idea. But I went. There were far less than a hundred people in a church capable of holding about a thousand, but when a unanimous call came, I accepted.”

“And has your congregation grown?” asked Baxter.

“Not a bit of it,” replied the other. “There’s no more interest in the place today than there was when I first went there. I have worked like a slave, too. I have tried to do everything in my power to arouse some sort of new

life there, but all in vain. In fact, I am what is called ‘an unsuccessful minister.’ And yet I can’t help realizing that I came here for a purpose.”

“What purpose?” asked Baxter.

“I don’t know,” replied the other. “The congregation at St. George’s Chapel is made up of a few well-to-do families. They are all as worldly as Dives, and I do not think they know the meaning of the word ‘Spirituality.’ They do not trouble about the size of the congregation, but I must give them credit for being very liberal in their support of good institutions. In reality, however, it’s a mockery of a church.”

“And yet you told me a little while ago that you are sure of Jesus Christ.”

“Yes, I told you that.”

“And you hold to that in spite of what you have just told me?”

“That is what I can’t understand,” replied Wallace. “Yes,” and his eyes lit up with a strange light, “I can see no reason why I was led to come to Baronstown at all, and my stay here has, so far, been an utter failure. Yet I have a call it consciousness, if you will, or anything you like—that my coming will not be in vain.”

A silence fell between the two young men after this which lasted for more than a minute. Then Wallace spoke again: “Look here, Lancaster,” he said, “why did you speak to me tonight?”

“Have I done wrong by doing so?” evaded Baxter.

“I don’t know,” replied the other, “but I have been wondering. As you know, we Scotch people, as a whole, are regarded as what you call ‘hard-headed,’ and seldom carried away by impulse. On the other hand, the Scotch Highlander is very superstitious, and believes in second sight, and all that sort of thing. Whether there is any truth in this or not I will not say, but I want to tell you something more. I did not mean to come here today. What, I asked myself, has Baxter Lancaster’s birthday to do with me? I knew practically nothing of you. I had heard you spoken of as an agnostic, if not an atheist, and, therefore, one who had no interest in such as I. And yet, after I had declined your father’s invitation, I felt I must come. A sort of command came to me. When I came and saw you, I did not mean to speak to you, yet I was sure I should. Can you explain why?”

Baxter Lancaster looked at his visitor steadily. Evidently thoughts were surging in his mind to which he was a stranger. “I want to tell you something,” he said at length.

“Yes, what?”

“I am puzzled. I really am.”

“What’s puzzling you?”

“The fact that I wanted to speak to you. For that matter, I am puzzled that you should be here in the house at all. I never gave you a thought during the earlier part of the day. You did not, in any way, seem to enter my life, and yet an hour or so ago when I asked you to tell me if you had seen Miss Peggy Edgecumbe, an overmastering desire came to me to talk to you, and I couldn’t help urging you to come into the house. Yesterday you were a stranger to me; today I seem to have known you for years. And yet I knew nothing about you—all the same, I wanted to. Just now I asked you to tell me about yourself, and about why you had come to Baronstown. I told you, too, that I had my reasons for asking, and that I would give you those reasons presently. I am going to give them now.”

Stephen Wallace looked at the other in wonder. He knew but little of Baxter Lancaster. During the time he had been in Baronstown he had heard him spoken of as being cold, self-controlled, and not a little reserved. “Look here, Lancaster,” he said, “I am awfully glad to be here, and more glad than I can say that you have spoken to me as freely as you have; but please don’t think I am asking for your confidences. I am not, and I do not wish—”

“But I want to tell you,” broke in the other. “That is why I have been speaking to you as I have. Wait a minute! It will come to me presently.”

He got up from the chair where he had been sitting, and walked excitedly around the room. His eyes were flashing strangely. Evidently he was much wrought upon. “You heard my grandfather speak a little while ago?” he said presently. “You heard him declare that this was my twenty-eighth birthday, and that from today I was a half-partner in the great firm of Amos Lancaster? I don’t mind confessing it to you, although why I should do so I don’t know, but he has today made me” a very rich man. As far as money is concerned, I can command almost anything. And yet—and this is what I am getting at, Wallace—life seems to me a great haggard failure. I suppose I ought to be the happiest fellow in Lancashire, and yet I believe I am about the most miserable. Why is it?”

## 4. Confessions

THE TWO YOUNG MEN looked into each other's eyes for some time without speaking. In a remarkable way the barriers which a few hours ago stood between them had melted, and although by birth and association their lives were utterly different, each felt that there was a common bond knitting them together.

As we have said, that morning they had been strangers; now they were friends. The heart of each had gone out to the other, and what would, under ordinary circumstances, have been impossible, was now not only possible, but natural.

Many years ago the writer of these lines felt that the story of David and Jonathan, as recorded in the Old Testament, seemed to lack reality, but since then experience has changed his opinion. For there is such a thing as a man suddenly falling in love with a man, and when he does a bond is created which is generally as strong as death. Be that as it may, just as the two youths met in the Old Testament story, and just as they were speaking as is described there, the soul of Baxter Lancaster was knit with the soul of Stephen Wallace, and Baxter loved him as his own soul.

"Before you can tell me what I asked you," said Baxter presently, "it will be necessary for me to describe to you something of my life. Up to the time I was six years of age I lived with my father and mother on the other side of the town, but they both died in the same year, and I was left an orphan. I don't think I realized their death much. You see, I was barely six years old at the time, and although I have memories concerning them, those memories are very dim and shadowy. This I do remember, however, on my father's death my grandfather, who had been living here alone for a good many years, brought me home with him, and I have been with him ever since."

"You went to Harrow, didn't you?" broke in Wallace.

"Yes, but that was not for several years after my grandfather brought me here. I went to a private school in the town until I was about twelve, then I

went away to Harrow. Nothing particular happened while I was there. As I remember it, I was fairly popular with the ' other boys, and was good at games. That's about all. i On leaving Harrow I went on to Trinity College in Cambridge. I was between eighteen and nineteen at the time, and fitted in very well with the life of the university."

Baxter stopped here, and seemed to be listening intently;

"That's grandfather," he said presently. "He is asking the servants about me. Would you mind my delaying the rest of my story until I have spoken to him?"

"Of course not," cried the other. "Would you like to postpone it altogether until another day?"

"No, I want to tell you now, but I will have a few words with grandfather first."

He rushed out of the room as he spoke, and a minute later brought old Amos Lancaster back.

"Ay, I am glad to see you," ejaculated the old man. "I don't remember ever speaking to you before. You are the minister of St. George's Independent Chapel, aren't you?"

Wallace informed him that he was.

"Ay, but you have a hard nut to crack there," affirmed the old man. "I can remember six parsons going to St. George's, and it just broke the heart of each one of them. Let's hope it won't break yours."

Wallace did not reply to this, although what the old man said was a curious commentary on what he had told Baxter a little while before.

"Anyhow, I am glad to see you," went on the old man, "and I am pleased that Baxter has asked you in. It is very strange, too, for Baxter is noan a parson's man. Have you seen all the festivities?" he added. "What time did you come?"

"I got here just before three, and have been here ever since," laughed Wallace.

"Ay, that's good. But have a bit of supper now, lad? It's hours agone sin' anything was served in the park! I should have liked to have had some of my friends here to supper, but Baxter persuaded me against it."

"Yes," replied Baxter. "You can see how tired he is now. What would he have been if he had to entertain a score or two of people?"

"Ay, weel," said old Amos presently, "I'll go to bed now. But don't you hurry away, young Wallace. Baxter is noan tired, if I am."



The old man ceased speaking for a moment, looking curiously at the young minister all the time. Then he burst out: " Ay, but I am glad to see thee. Baxter needs a chap like you; he does really."

"Wait for me a few minutes, Wallace," said Baxter as he led his grandfather out of the room. "I will be back presently."

"There have been curious stories about that young fellow," reflected the young minister, "but I don't believe there is anything in them. A young man of twenty-eight who can be fond of, and attentive to, an old man like that hasn't much wrong with him."

"You will excuse me for leaving you," said Baxter on his return, "but I was rather anxious about grandfather. He will be eighty in September, and although he is remarkably vigorous, it has been a trying day for him. I hope to have the old chap with me many a long year yet."

"I don't see any reason why you shouldn't," replied Wallace. "He looks remarkably hale."

"Yes, but today has shaken him up. It has been a kind of milestone. You see, he wanted to make an occasion of my twenty-eighth birthday and my being made a partner in the firm; and although he has found great pleasure in it, it has shaken him. Well, Wallace," and the young man threw himself into an arm-chair, "as I was telling you, I went on from Harrow to Cambridge, and I fitted in pretty well with the life there. It was there, too, where I began to think."

"Began to think!" repeated the other. "I don't follow you."

"I suppose I was always a dreamy sort of boy," went on the young man. "Even when I was only ten years old I read a good deal of poetry. So, in spite of what I have to tell you presently, there was something romantic in my nature. I was not conscious of having any clear or definite thoughts about anything all the time I was at school, but when I went to Cambridge I began thinking about what I should do with my life, and I had all sorts of hopes and dreams about the future. Of course I knew I was the grandson of a rich man, and although I had no definite plans, I knew that I should one day become the possessor of all my grandfather had."

He stopped here, and a faraway look came into his eyes as though he was communing with his own heart. "Did you ever hear of that story of Thomas Hardy just after he had published 'Jude the Obscure?'" he asked.

"No," replied the other. "What was it?"

Baxter told him the story over which he had been ruminating during the day, and which we mentioned a little while ago. "That's just where I think I am," he said to Wallace.

"Where you are! What do you mean?"

"I mean this," said Baxter. "I am twenty-eight years of age today. I have become partner in a huge concern which is also very prosperous, and I am one of the richest young men in Lancashire. It seems as though I had everything to make life bright and gay. But dash it, Wallace! I believe if I had my choice whether I would have been born or not, knowing what I do, I'd have said no."

"You don't mean that!" exclaimed the other.

"But I do. After all, get down to the foundations of life. Take it as it is; its ups and downs; its bright days and its sad days. What has it to offer? I couldn't help thinking of it this afternoon as I was in the park. The people hadn't yet come, although the workmen were preparing for the festivities. My grandfather was near the back of the house by the platform talking with some of the men, and I regarded him as a very favorable example of what life has to give. He is eighty years of age. He has a good name throughout the whole of Lancashire. He might, had he so desired, have had a knighthood or baronetcy, and judging his life from that side, it's been a great success. But he lost my grandmother when he was quite a young man, and his only son died when I was a kiddy. Now his life is drawing to its close. A few more years, at the most, the end will come. Yes, it has been a very successful life, but has it been worth while?"

"He has got you still," remarked Wallace.

"Yes, he has got me, and, honestly, I believe I am his pride and joy. But then, I am young, and he is old, and try all I may, I can't see life as he sees it. Frankly, Wallace, I feel, as I told you a little while ago, that life is a great haggard failure, and that it is not worth the living. Do you think it is?"

"Yes," cried Wallace. "A thousand times yes!"

"Are you saying that because it is the correct thing to say, or because you really feel it?"

"I say it because I know it!" replied the young minister.

"Good God!" exclaimed Baxter. "You were telling me a little while ago about your life as the minister of St. George's Congregational Church. You admitted that your flock were all descendants of Dives, and they hadn't a suggestion of spirituality in their natures. You admitted, too, that you had

utterly failed in your job, and when I asked you about it you got up and stamped around the room like a man half mad. Is that life? Do you mean to tell me, on careful consideration, that you are satisfied with it?"

"'Hope springs eternal in the human breast,'" quoted Wallace.

"A worn-out platitude, my dear man. It may be true while we are young, but what about it when we get old?"

"What a pessimist you are," laughed Wallace. "Anyone would think you had been reading the Book of Ecclesiastes."

"Well, I haven't. For that matter, I don't think I have opened a Bible since I left Cambridge. As I told you, however, I read a good deal of poetry as a boy, and no doubt I was influenced by it."

"Who are your favorite poets?"

"Oh, I read Shelley and Byron."

"Byron, eh?"

"Yes, Byron. In spite of all people may say, he was a great man, and was able to summarize life in a verse."

"Fancy a young fellow with life all before him and the world at his feet finding pleasure in Byron!" laughed Wallace.

"I do not say I found pleasure in him, but he had a way of looking into the heart of things."

"When?" asked the other.

"When he wrote this:

'Count o'er the joys thy life hath seen,  
Count o'er thy days from anguish free;  
And know whatever thou hast been,  
'Tis something better—not to be.'

The young minister laughed immoderately. "Fancy anyone accepting that as the creed of life!" he said.

"I have something more to tell you," went on Baxter. "I don't know why I should bother you with what you regard as my foolishness, but I am in a strange mood. Besides, in spite of everything, you make me want to confide in you. I have had a curious experience today. As you know, it is my twenty-eighth birthday, and all these festivities which you have witnessed have been in my honor and for my pleasure. More than that, my grandfather wanted to celebrate it in a fashion which was abhorrent to me."

The young minister looked at him curiously, but he asked no questions.

“I don’t suppose I ought to tell you,” went on Baxter, “but it seems to me as though I can’t help myself. Besides, I know you will regard what I am going to say as sacred, and that it will never pass your lips. You saw Sir William Templeton with my grandfather this afternoon?”

Wallace nodded.

“Did you see his daughter?”

“Yes.”

“What did you think of her?”

“She scarcely belongs to my world,” replied Wallace, “and I have had no means of forming an opinion of her. Certainly she struck me as very handsome, but I should judge her to be as cold as an icicle.”

“No, she isn’t,” replied Baxter. “In many ways she is— But there! I will not try to describe her. At any rate, she is the woman my grandfather wants me to make my wife.”

“Well?” queried Wallace after Baxter had lapsed into silence.

“I couldn’t, man! I couldn’t! Mind, I love my grandfather, and would do almost anything to please him. To be absolutely frank, I am not sure she would regard me favorably, although she was very graciOUS to me. I spent more than an hour alone with her this afternoon, and tried to bring myself to say what my grandfather wanted me to say; but I couldn’t. I felt that even if I were successful I should be selling what soul I’ve got in order to be linked up with an aristocratic family. Besides, something happened.”

“Something happened! I don’t understand you.”

“Yes, you brought it to a head.”

“I brought it to a head! In what way?” There was real astonishment in Wallace’s voice.

“Look here, Wallace,” went on Baxter after another silence, “I have spoken freely to you. Can you speak as freely to me?”

“Yes, I think I can. I don’t know why it is, but I feel towards you as I have never felt towards a man before.”

“Good I I have for the last hour been hoping you would. Now, tell me, are you in love with Peggy Edgecumbe?”

“Have—have you—any right to ask a question like that?” asked Wallace excitedly.

“No, I haven’t. All the same, I should like to know.”

“Why would you like to know?”

“Because seeing you together this afternoon stopped me from speaking to Evelyn Templeton. Are you in love with her?”

“Yes,” replied Wallace. His voice had changed somehow. Indeed, it might not have been his voice at all.

“Have you told her so?”

“Look here, Lancaster, have you any right to ask that question?”

“I don’t know. But have you?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“Today.”

“And what reply did she make?—No, don’t be angry with me. I have a reason for asking; a sufficient reason, too.”

The eyes of the two men met again, and it was easy to see that they were both deadly in earnest.

“She refused you, didn’t she?” asked Baxter.— “No, don’t be angry with me; I know she refused you. She has refused me, too.”

“Then you, too, have asked her today?”

“Yes.—I can see what you are thinking, and you are laughing at me for saying what I said just now. Come, tell me the truth, are you?”

It was easy to see that Baxter was much excited, and that he had well-nigh lost control over his language.

“You are saying to yourself,” he went on, “that if Miss Edgecumbe had given me a different answer I shouldn’t be meandering about life being a haggard failure.—Perhaps I shouldn’t, but it would not alter facts. In my heart of hearts I should know, even if she had accepted me, that life was, essentially, what I said it was. I have only to think of my grandfather to know that.”

Baxter had by this time risen from his chair again, and was pacing the room excitedly.

“What do you mean by that, Lancaster?” asked the young minister.

“What I said just now. Here he is, hale and hearty at nearly eighty years of age. He may be good for another ten years, but the end will come all the same. And then— my God, I can’t bear to think of it I Look here, Wallace, why did she refuse you? Do you feel you know me well enough to tell me?”

Again the eyes of the two young men met, and although both of them were typical Britishers, each felt a desire to speak to the other freely. Which goes to prove that the fashions of a day count as nothing when life’s deepest

emotions are stirred. This is an age when men mock at emotions, and when they are reserved concerning the deepest things of life. At least, it is supposed to be so. Nevertheless, there come times when the heart longs for its mate, and longs to pour out itself to another.

“I have been trying to understand,” replied the young minister. “I think she wanted to say yes, but couldn’t.”

“Why?”

“First of all because I don’t think she was sure that she liked me enough. I know you spoke of her as a hoyden a little while ago, but at heart she is a more than ordinarily thoughtful girl. More than that, she is tremendously conscientious, and although I know she likes me, she made me feel that she was not sure she liked me enough. But that wasn’t her real reason for refusing me.”

“No?” replied Baxter. “What was it?”

“She told me she didn’t feel fit for a minister’s wife. Of course I laughed at her, and told her I didn’t care a hang whether she was fit or not. I assured her that I didn’t want to marry her because she was fit, or that she would make a suitable minister’s wife, but because I loved her. Whereupon she told me that She would feel it to be sacrilege to marry a minister of the Gospel. I asked her why, and then she told me what I never suspected.”

“What was that?” asked Baxter.

“It wouldn’t be fair to tell you,” replied the young minister.

“Why not?”

“Because I feel I should be betraying a sacred trust.”

Both young men lapsed into silence; a silence which was at length broken by Lancaster. “I know what it was,” he said.

“How do you know?”

“Because she said the same to me. She is just where I am, theologically, Wallace. She believes in nothing, and she hates her infidelity. She told me that she loathed the very idea of linking her life to that of a man who had no thought for anything beyond the world we are living in. But what is the use? We can’t alter facts. It would only be mocking one’s reason to talk about another life than this when there is no other life.”

“We part company there,” Wallace said, rising to his feet. “But I mustn’t stay talking any longer. I must go now. It is past midnight, and I remember that I have work to do tomorrow. Hark! What’s that?”

It was more than an hour since old Amos Lancaster had gone to bed, leaving the two young men alone. Nearly all the inmates of the old house had gone to sleep, and the silence of night had fallen upon everything.

“Why do you ask?” the other queried.

“I thought I heard somebody knocking at the front door.”

A few seconds later Baxter Lancaster had reached the main entrance of the house, and was opening an old iron studded door which had been there since the days when the great family of Baronoldswick had first built the house.

“Is that Mr. Baxter?” he heard a voice say as he peered into the night.

“Yes. Who is it?”

“Please excuse me, Mr. Baxter, but I thought Mr. Wallace might be here. Several people told me that they saw him go into the house with you, and so I came on chance like.”

Baxter thought he recognized the voice, and although he could not see the speaker’s face plainly, he saw in the darkness of the summer night the outline of what he took to be a young man’s form. He felt sure he knew the voice, too. “Is that Frank Stuttard?” he asked.

“Yes, Mr. Baxter.”

“What do you want?”

“Is Mr. Stephen Wallace here?”

“Yes, he is.”

“I wonder if he would mind coming to see my aunt. I am told she is dying, and I think she would like to see Mr. Wallace before she goes. Uncle Ned has been with her all the afternoon. He hasn’t been up here to the fete,” he added.

“I’ll fetch Mr. Wallace,” replied Baxter. “Will you come inside for a minute?”

He led the way into the hall as he spoke, and then went into the room where Wallace waited.

“It’s a young fellow called Frank Stuttard,” he said when he reached the room where Wallace was. “I think he is the bearer of sad news. Anyhow, he wants to see you.”

“Of course,” replied Wallace. “I know Frank Stuttard very well. He goes to my church, when he goes anywhere.”

He followed Baxter into the hall, where they found a young fellow about twenty years of age who was evidently much relieved at seeing the young

minister.

“It’s this way,” the young man explained. “My Aunt Eliza wur took ill last night. She’s bin a bit poorly for a goodish while now; but last night she wur took worse. However, she didn’t believe in making a fuss, like, and so she said nowt to my Uncle Ned. But today she is worse, and so, although my uncle badly wanted to come to the fête, he stayed with her. Well, as I was coming away from here an hour or two agone I said to myself, ‘I’ll go down Briggate way and see how Aunt Eliza is,’ and just as I was passing the door I saw the doctor come out. He told me that aunt was very ill, and that he doubted if she’d last till morning. So I went in to see her, and she said she would like to see you if you could be found. I have been to your house, but your housekeeper said you hadn’t come home; so then I come up here. Will you come?”

“Of course I will,” replied Wallace. “You go back and tell your uncle that I will call in a little while.”

“Heavens, old man I” said Baxter to Wallace as the young minister made his way towards the door. “I don’t envy you your job.”

“Death must always be a solemn thing,” replied Wallace.

“Yes, and it’s so utterly hopeless,” was the other’s comment; “and there is nothing you can say or do to help.”

“Pardon me, I don’t think so.”

“Why? Do you really believe in the platitudes which you must, of course, trot out to old Ned Stuttard?”

“I am sure of the message I’ve got to give him,” replied Wallace.

“And what’s that?”

“That life and death are all the same to God. I am sure of that. I am sure, too, that if Eliza Stuttard dies tonight it will not be the end of life, but the beginning. I am sure, too, that life beyond the grave will not be less than this, but greater, fuller.”

An eager light came into Baxter Lancaster’s eyes as the other spoke. “By Jove, Wallace I” he said. “Do you mean that?”

“I am sure of it,” replied the young minister. “Good night; I must hurry away.”

Baxter Lancaster caught his outstretched hand as if to return his farewell greeting. Then he said eagerly: “I will walk to the house with you, if I may. I am excited tonight, and I couldn’t sleep if I went to bed.”

The two young men walked towards the lodge gates.



## 5. Triumph or Despair?

THE DISTANCE FROM BARONS COURT front door to the lodge gates was perhaps half a mile. Around the house several large trees grew which darkened the entrance somewhat, but once out in the park, the light was much brighter.

As we have said, it was now the first of June, and the glory of early summer was upon everything. Even there, within the smoke zone of a great Lancashire manufacturing town which was situated in the midst of the industrial district of the county, the summer night was sweet and pleasant, and as Baxter Lancaster made his way along the drive and felt the night breezes fan his forehead, he felt glad to be alive.

“Yes, it’s good to be alive, and healthy, and strong,” he said to his companion, “and it’s one’s duty to make the most of life, isn’t it?”

“I thought you said a little while ago that life was a great haggard failure?” retorted Wallace.

“Yes,” replied the other. “I spoke without thinking.”

“When? When you said it was good to be alive, or when you said life was a great haggard failure?”

“Both, I suppose,” replied the young Lancashireman. “After all, I agree with Emerson when he said that ‘consistency was the bugbear of little minds.’ One can’t be consistent.”

“The fact of the matter is, Lancaster,” said the young minister, “you don’t believe in your pessimistic creed.”

“Look here, Wallace, I’ve been bothered a good deal this afternoon, and it is probable that what I said to you may have been colored by my experiences. Of course, as you can imagine, such a day as this sets one thinking. Had I been fortunate in my love-making, my thoughts might have been invested with a rosier hue. But let me ask you a question. You said just now that you came here this afternoon just after three o’clock, and that you have been here ever since?”

“That’s true.”

“Now then, will you tell me this? You walked around the grounds, and studied the faces of the crowd, didn’t you?”

“I watched the people? Yes.”

“Then tell me, did you see ten faces belonging to people of more than fifty years of age that were bright, and happy, and cheerful?”

“I scarcely know what you mean.”

“Well then, I’ll explain. Today’s fete, as you know, was mine. The crowd came to wish me well. More than a thousand of our own work people were here, beside a host of others. Well, I was naturally thoughtful, and I went everywhere, and watched the crowd. The day was fine; the band discoursed gay music, and my grandfather had arranged for all sorts of amusements for the people. But this struck me, and I couldn’t drive the fact from my mind. Nearly everyone who had passed middle age looked sad, and hopeless, and miserable. The young people were gay. Their eyes sparkled; their laughter was contagious; everywhere they were characterized by health and happiness, but the sad thing was that only a comparatively few of the elderly people looked cheerful and happy. That was the thing that struck me, and it bothered me.”

“And what deduction did you draw from that?”

“The deduction I drew,” replied Lancaster, “was that the joy of life lay in its youth, but not in its old age; that it was only while we could look forward that there was anything to rejoice in. The children are happy because they have a future; lovers are happy because they live in a blissful present. In fact, while there’s vigor, and elasticity, and abundant life there’s happiness, but directly life begins to decay, when the centers of life become dried up, when old age begins to creep through our veins, vivacity, confidence and joy fade away.”

They had reached the road by this time, and were making their way towards the town. The night was still comparatively clear. Nevertheless, as they wended their way down the hill where the population became more dense and where the houses were built thickly, both realized that the atmosphere became more and more sluggish and smoke-laden.

Presently they reached an open space where several tram-lines met, and where both realized that they were nearing the heart of the town.

“Isn’t it ghastly?” cried Lancaster.

“Isn’t what ghastly?”

“All this granite and steel,” was the reply. “What fools people are to live here!”

“Why do you live here?”

“By a stroke of good fortune I am the grandson of a wealthy man, and I live in a big house on the top of the hill, but the great mass of the Baronstown population live down here where the air is smoke-laden and the flowers cannot live. But there I I suppose they live here because their work lies here. What a curse it is that work and the production of the necessities of life always mean ugliness! Upon my soul, if I belonged to the working classes I would begin a movement for the smashing up of everything, and then I’d desert this infernal region of smoke and sulphur, and get out into the country where the air is sweet and pure.”

“And what good would you do?”

“God only knows! I don’t; but everything makes me in a passion.”

After this neither of them spoke for several minutes. Possibly Wallace was thinking of his visit to a dying woman, while Baxter was still under the influence of what he had been saying to his companion.

Presently they reached the end of a square which looked quiet and restful.

“Mr. Ned Stuttard lives here,” remarked Wallace, “so I will say good night. Thank you for walking so far with me.”

“I will go into the square with you,” rejoined the other. “I have known Ned Stuttard since I was a boy, and I should like to know how his wife is.”

The two young men entered the square together, but they had not gone far before the youth who had called at Barons Court a little while before met them. Evidently he was in a state of panic; he panted as though he had been running. “I wouldn’t go any further if I were you,” was his greeting. “Aunt Eliza is dead, and Uncle Ned is gone mad!”

“What!” exclaimed the young minister.

“Aunt Eliza is dead, and Uncle Ned is gone mad,” he repeated. “I came out because I was afraid. She was dead when I got back from your house. My Uncle Ned was tearing his hair, and swearing awful—and he isn’t a man who swears, either. It is just terrible. He frightened me, and I ran out to meet you. I don’t think I’d try to go in if I were you.”

Young Frank Stuttard spoke in short, quick gasps. Evidently he was much excited.

“Of course I’ll go in,” said Wallace. “I may be able to help.” “Who’s in the house?” he asked, turning to the youth.

“I don’t know,” was his reply, and then he began to mutter incoherently.

A look almost amounting to fear came into Wallace’s eyes as he turned towards the farther comer of the square where a house of larger dimensions than the others stood. “I am glad you are coming with me, Lancaster,” he said. “My God, it must be terrible for old Ned!”

Lancaster made no response, except to lead the way to Ned Stuttard’s house.

The two young men came up to the door, and listened. At first no sound reached them, except what seemed like the stamp of heavy footsteps. Presently, however, they heard, what seemed to them, the sound of voices, and a sense of relief came into both their hearts. They felt glad that the bereaved man was not alone.

A minute later both saw that the door was not closed, and, pushing it wide open, they found their way into the passage.

“I tell you I don’t believe it,” both of them heard a voice say. “It’s only a game you’re playing on me! You are only playing a game, aren’t you, my beauty? Tell me, that’s a dear lass!”

To this there was no reply, and after a long silence, which was broken only by the sound of heavy, gasping sobs, they heard the voice continue:

“You aren’t dead, are you, Eliza? Tell me you aren’t dead!” Again there was a silence; then the voice went on: “Yes, she is dead!—Then God is a devil— No, it’s no use your telling me He isn’t; He is, or else how would He allow Eliza to die!—Why, she’s all I’ve got! We’ve neither chick nor child, and, and— My God! My God!”

“Where is he?” whispered the young minister.

“He is up there alone in his wife’s bedroom,” replied Baxter. “Shall we go up?”

Wallace nodded, while Baxter led the way upstairs towards the sound of the voice he had heard.

Baxter did not at all know why he was doing this. Edward Stuttard, although he had known him practically all his life, was not a friend of his; neither, indeed, were they very intimate. Still, with that neighborly feeling which is characteristic of the Lancashire people, he wanted to help him if he could.

Nevertheless, he felt out of place; felt, indeed, as though he were intruding upon the sanctities of life by making his way up the stairs. He was a stranger to the house, and he could not at all understand why the old man was left alone under such circumstances. Nevertheless, he almost unconsciously went in the direction from which the voice had come, and presently both of them found themselves at the open doorway of a bedroom. Both of them thought they heard whispering voices in the near distance, but they were not sure.

“Mr. Stuttard,” young Stephen Wallace ventured, “may I come in?”

To this there was no reply, save quick, panting breaths.

“Mr. Stuttard,” the young minister repeated, “may I come in?”

For answer both of them heard hasty footsteps coming towards them, and a minute later a man of about sixty-five years of age appeared. “Come in? Who are you? Of course no one may come in I Do you know what this is? It is my bedroom! How dare you intrude?—Oh, I forgot, though; what privacy is there for the dead?”

“Don’t you know who I am, Mr. Stuttard?”

“Know who you are I I suppose you are young Wallace! But I have nothing to say to you; nothing to do with you. What good are you? That’s what I want to know. Can you bring Eliza back? She’s all I want!”

Both of them saw that the man they had come to see had turned again to the bedside on which the light streamed fiercely. He was a man of gigantic proportions. He stood at least two inches above six feet and he had the shoulders and chest of a giant. The fear which had come into the hearts of both of them a few minutes before increased as they looked at him, and both unconsciously felt like attesting to young Frank Stuttard’s statement that he was mad. His eyes burned red, while his features were contorted as if in agony. Perspiration was streaming down his face, and he lifted his clenched fists above his head as if in the act of cursing. “Do you hear?” he shouted. “Eliza is dead! She was all I had in the world, and she is dead!—What! you tell me I am a rich man! What do I care about money? What are a few thousand pounds to me? I’ve lost Eliza! She was friend, comrade, wife, everything; and now she is dead! DEAD!”

A great sense of pity filled Baxter Lancaster’s heart as he watched the stricken man’s face. It was horrible to see him. Of course he knew; everyone knew of the affection which existed between old Edward Stuttard — or Ned, as he was generally called—and his wife. They had been

married for more than forty years, and although no children blessed their union, one and all felt that there was something sacred in their comradeship.

As it has been hinted, this couple were associated with what was called St. George's Independent Chapel, where Stephen Wallace was the minister, and although Edward Stuttard seldom went to the chapel, his uprightness and his integrity were a matter for general praise.

"Nay, old Ned is noan religious," many remarked concerning him, "but he is a jolly sight better than a lot that are. His word is as good as his bond, and no one can ever say he cheated anyone of a penny."

Which was doubtless true. The Stuttards had for generations been noted for their uprightness, and although, as we have said, Ned made no profession of religion, the examples which his father and grandfather had set before him were not in vain.

His wife, however, had been more or less closely connected with St. George's Chapel. She had been a teacher in the Sunday school there. Indeed, it was at a Saturday night's entertainment, long years before, when Ned and she had first paired up. They were married not long after, and although he declared he was "noan religious," never once had he put an obstacle in the way of what she regarded as her religious duties.

"I was up at Barons Court," Wallace said quietly, going to the old man and holding out his hand. "I had been there to the fête, and when I heard that Mrs. Stuttard was ill, I thought I would come and see if I could be of any service."

"Service!" Madness still shone from his eyes. "Look at that!" and he pointed to the still form on the bed. "A better woman never lived than she I We were married more than forty years ago, but now—"

"I know," broke in Wallace quietly, "exactly how you are feeling."

"It's a lie! You don't!" gasped the old man. "No one can know how I am feeling. Good God, you must be mad! Why, man, two hours ago, or something like that, she was talking quietly with me as to what she was going to do, and now she is gone—gone for ever!"

"No, she is not gone for ever," and Wallace spoke clearly and distinctly.

"What's that you say? Not gone for ever I Where is she, then?"

"I don't know where she is except that she is with God," replied Wallace.

"God! What do you know about God?" and still there was madness in his voice.

"I know this," replied Wallace; " that God never makes a mistake, and that whatever He does, He does in love."

The old man laughed the laugh of a maniac. "Don't talk such muck!" he cried in mad anger. "Do you think I am a fool! But there! What's the use of my getting into a passion? You are only mocking me!"

"I am not mocking you," and Wallace continued to speak firmly and clearly, "and I am as sure of what I am telling you as I am sure of my own life," he continued. "I wouldn't come here else. I would have kept away from you if I were not sure of what I was going to say."

"What are you going to say, then?" and there was a suggestion of curiosity in old Ned's eyes.

"I am going to say this," replied Wallace. "Your wife isn't dead. I mean it. She isn't dead. Her body is dead—that I can see—but she, the woman that loved you, isn't dead."

"Where is she, then?" and incredulity was mingled with madness in his eyes.

"Perhaps she is here," replied the young man. "I think that very likely she is, and she is wanting to tell you not to give way to foolish grief. You see,;"Mr. Stuttard, her body doesn't live for ever, but her personality will. Your wife's body is dead, but she, the real she, is still alive, and still loving you, and caring for you, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if she isn't here now. I am sure of this; sure that God is caring for her and loving her as He always did."

"Look here," cried old Ned, "I'll murder you if you have told me a lie! My God, I will! I am nearly mad! Can't you see I am!" and placing his two great hands on the young minister's shoulders, he looked him straight in the eyes. "It isn't bunkum, is it, that you are telling me?" and he shouted out the question.

"No, it's the greatest truth in the world," cried Wallace.

"What's the greatest truth in the world?"

"That those who love God never die, and I am sure your wife loved God."

"Ay, she did," said the old man. "That's true enough. I used to laugh at her for her religious notions, but she stuck to them!" Then a new thought seemed to come into his mind. "But can't you see, man, that puts us farther off from each other. If she loved God, and she did, and I care nowt about God, don't you see that it makes it impossible for us to be pals any longer.

But there! There's nowt in it! Nowt in it! No"—and he flung his hand towards Wallace as if to forbid further speech—"I hate your God! I do!" He hesitated, and then went on: "If there is a God at all—and I very much doubt it, but if there is, why, just think!—We've been all in all to each other for more than forty years," he said slowly. "We have known each other all our lives, but we never came together like till one night at St. George's chapel. There was a sort of entertainment and Christmas party on there. I had been thinking all the evening what a bonny lass she was, but even then I never thought of courting her, until I went into a vestry about something, and found her there. The moment her bright eyes shone into mine, I knew that she was all the world to me, and I took her hands in mine. 'Eliza,' I said to her. 'Ay, Ned,' she said, her great eyes looking into mine. 'May I kiss tha, lass?' I said. She didn't speak a word, but she kept on looking at me like. Then I held her to my heart, and kissed her. More than forty years have gone since then, but we have kept true to each other all the time, and we have never ceased loving each other. In dark days and bright days, in summer and winter, it has always been the same. And now she's gone! Don't you understand, young Wallace—she's dead! She will never kiss me again! What have you to say to that?"

"I have this to say," replied the young minister. "The best is yet to be if you like to make it so."

Old Ned seemed to be trying to grasp the meaning of what Wallace had said to him. For a moment, at all events, he was calmer, and while the fact that his wife was gone from him darkened his whole being and made his outlook on life something to be shuddered at, the minister's words held his attention.

"Look here," he said, "dost 'a mean that? Tell me, honestly, it's not bunkum, is it? I can see she is dead, and up to the time you came I thought—no, I daren't tell you what I thought—but I was in hell. But if there is any truth in what you say—"

"There is truth; it is true," asseverated Wallace. "There's nothing truer on earth than that."

"And you believe I shall see her again?"

"I believe you may see her again," replied Wallace.

A new light came into his eyes. It was not the light of hope, much less certainty, but the look of agonized despair had gone.



“At any rate,” he said presently, and evidently he realized his position, “it is good of you to call and see me. I am afraid I should have done something desperate. I was all alone when Eliza was taken worse, and I went to the telephone and called up the doctor right away, but he hadn’t been gone long before I could see how it was, and I nearly went mad. There are two servants in the house somewhere, but where they are I don’t know. I drove them away. I said I would murder them if they didn’t go at once. Then my nephew, Frank, came; where he is I don’t know. Who is that standing in the doorway?” and he looked towards Baxter Lancaster.

“You know Mr. Lancaster, don’t you?” asked Wallace. “I was up at Barons Court when your nephew came to find me.”

“Oh, I remember now,” exclaimed the old man. “Owd Amos asked Eliza and me to come, and I said we would, but of course— But there 1 What’s that?” he added a few seconds later. “That sounds like Frank’s voice. Who can that be with him? Ay, it’s Dr. Black come again. But he can’t do any good now; it’s too late!”

A few minutes later Baxter Lancaster and Stephen Wallace left the house again. The former had scarcely spoken to the bereaved man; he felt it would be out of place for him to do so. Nevertheless, he was glad to see that, under young Wallace’s ministrations, he was in a less desperate mood than when they had first entered the house. Moreover, Dr. Black, a well-known medical man in the town, had assumed his authority in the house, and had sent young Frank Stuttard to obtain the assistance of an old lady who had more than once served under his orders.

“You are sure what you told me is true?” old Ned Stuttard had said to Stephen Wallace as he had left the house.

“Yes, I am sure, Mr. Stuttard.”

“Then come again in the morning,” was his request, as he watched the two young men walk away.

They did not go far together, however. On reaching the junction of the tram-lines which stood near to the entrance of the square where old Ned Stuttard lived, they stopped instinctively, and shook hands.

“It has been a funny day, Wallace,” ejaculated Baxter.

“It has.”

“It seems to me as though I have gone through the whole gamut of human emotions,” he said. He was still holding Stephen Wallace’s hand as he spoke.

“It might seem as though you have,” Wallace replied.

“I can’t realize it,” went on Baxter. “I seem to be in a kind of dream. This morning at breakfast my grandfather told me of his intention to announce our partnership in business, and he told me, too, of his hopes about my future. Since then everything seems to have happened, and—and I hardly know where I am.”

“One thing has happened to me, anyhow,” Wallace declared, “and that one thing has made life different for me.”

“What’s that?” asked Baxter curiously.

“I’ve found a friend,” replied Wallace. “Good night, Baxter.”

“Good night, Stephen,” replied the other, and he walked rapidly away towards Barons Court.

## 6. Confirmations

“BEEN DOWN to the factories?”

“Yes.”

“Anything happened there?”

“Nothing out of the ordinary. I asked Chadwick when I saw him early this morning if you were awake, and he told me you were sound asleep, so I thought I had better let you sleep on.”

“Ay,” responded the old man.

“Still, I knew you would be glad to know if anything had taken place at the factories, and so I went down.”

“And there was nothing?”

“No, nothing of importance. I opened all the letters, and gave Standing instructions to deal with them, and then I came back.”

Old Amos Lancaster laughed. “It’s a long time since I slept so late of a morning,” he declared.

“It’s right you should,” replied Baxter, “and for the future you will only get up when you want to.”

“I’m noan going to agree to that,” was the old man’s reply. “Tomorrow I’ll be down to breakfast at eight o’clock, but I can’t deny I was a bit tired this morning. I had a long day yesterday, and although we had a grand time—well, it told upon me. I’m not so strong as I was, Baxter, my boy.”

“Perhaps not, but you are strong even yet.”

“Ay, not so bad.” Then, like one suddenly making up his mind, he burst out: “We had a grand day yesterday, but things didn’t go as I wanted them to.”

“No? How was that?”

“You know, Baxter, my boy. Still, it’s noan too late yet. I hope to see you settled before I die. But is there anything the matter, lad?”

“Why do you ask?”

“You look anxious. Has anything wrong happened?”

“Not as it affects us.”

“But what is it, lad?”

“You went to sleep quickly after I saw you to your room last night, didn’t you?” asked Baxter.

“Ay, I did, lad; I was very tired.”

“Anyhow, something happened after you went to sleep.”

“What?”

“Mrs. Ned Stuttard died last night.”

“Ay, you don’t mean to say so!”

“Yes, young Frank Stuttard came up here for Wallace.”

“Ay. I know that Eliza liked him, and that she always went to St. George’s Independent Chapel.”

“I went to the house with him,” went on Baxter; and then he related what had taken place. “I thought he was going mad,” he concluded.

Old Amos’s lips quivered, but he made no further sign as Baxter told his story. “I like that Wallace chap,” he asseverated presently.

“I like him, too,” replied Baxter. “I never took any notice of him before yesterday. Of course, I heard that he had come into the town as the minister of St. George’s Independent Chapel, but I took no notice of it. As you know, I have had nothing to say to parsons.”

Old Amos did not speak.

“Wallace and I got talking,” went on the younger man presently, “and I liked him.” He’s a good chap, and as sincere and honest as the day. That’s why I asked him into the house last night.”

“I am glad you did,” replied Amos. “You have very few friends in Baronstown.”

“He’s got hold of something which I know nothing about,” burst out Baxter presently.

“What?”

“He’s got hold of the secret of happiness,” replied the young man.

“What dost ’a mean?”

“Just that.”

“And aren’t you happy?”

“So-so,” replied Baxter.

“Is that all?” asked the old man a little anxiously. “Nay, lad, that will noan do. Tell me more.”

But Baxter did not speak. Instead, he turned to the newspaper, and read it as though eager for news.

“Look here,” went on the old man presently, “there’s summat wrong and we can’t have that, especially at the beginning of our new arrangement. As I told you yesterday, everything I do is for you. I had that fete here yesterday for your sake; I took you into partnership because I thought you would like it, and I hoped you would make it up with that Templeton lass before the day was out. I was sorry you didn’t; I was for sure.”

“I am sorry I disappointed you, grandfather,” Baxter said after a long silence, “but you said you wanted me to be happy. I am afraid Evelyn Templeton could not make me happy. You see, she cares nothing about me, and—”

“But she does, Baxter, my boy,” interrupted the old man eagerly. “I am sure she does.”

“You didn’t ask her, did you?” and there was an .. anxious tone in Baxter’s voice.

“Nay, I don’t say that, but I am sure she likes you. I was a bit bothered yesterday, I was for sure. I could see you were noan happy, and I was afraid that you had asked her and that she had refused you. No, you needn’t fear; I didn’t give you away. But I am sure she likes you, and I’d bet five to one that she would say yes if you asked her. And look here, Baxter, my boy, you will never be happy until you get a wife and settle down. I know it was so in my case. I was never happy until I married your grandmother, and had her to live with me.”

"Grandfather! burst out Baxter after another long silence.

“Yes, my boy.”

“Do you mind my asking you a question?”

“Of course I don’t. Things will be coming to a nice pass if my grandson couldn’t ask me what he liked.”

“Well, then, it is this way, grandfather. Were you happy with my grandmother?” A faraway, wistful look came into the old man’s eyes. “Happy, my lad? The two years we lived together were like heaven! It seemed to me that having her was having; all I wanted. We fitted each other down to the ground, and although people laugh at such a thing in these days, we never had a cross word. When she died I thought I should have gone mad. I should, too, but for your father. Your grandmother died in giving him to me, and—and— But there! I can’t bear to talk about it even now.”

“Then my father didn’t quite take my grandmother’s place?”

“How could he? He was only a little ’un, and it was a long time before he began to take notice. Then when a couple of years had passed away and your father was growing into a fine boy, I more and more opened my heart to him. But he did not take your grandmother’s place; no one could ever do that.”

“What kind of a man was my father?”

“Not unlike you in appearance; but he was not clever. I always said that he never inherited either the brains of his mother or of me. Still, he was a straight lad, and he married a good woman; It was a bit of a wrench for me to let him go away from home, but I never believe in young married people living with the old folks. Besides—” and the old man lapsed into silence.

“Yes, he was just a quiet, good, straight man,” he went on, “and his loss was a terrible blow to me, especially as he and his wife went so near together. But his death had one compensation,” he added.

“What was that?”

“I took you here to live with me,” replied old Amos, “and it wasn’t long before you became more to me than your father had ever been to me. You were the very image of mother, too, and as sharp as a needle. Ay, I did love to see you growing up to be a smart, clever, good boy. Mighty glad I was that I was able to give you a good education. It has been a joy to me to slave for you. I worked hard to make things easy for your father, but I didn’t have half the pleasure working for him as I have had working for you.”

“I am sorry you should have bothered about me,” and there was an uneasy look in Baxter Lancaster’s eyes.

“What else had I to live for?” asked the old man. “Your grandmother had been dead for many years, and then when your father and mother were taken away, what was left to me? Do you know, my boy, that on the day I took you here to live with me I made up my mind that you should be a millionaire.”

“Was it worth while, grandfather?”

“What else is worth while if that isn’t?” asked the old man. “As I told you yesterday, I have had my dreams about you, and I hope to live until I see those dreams come true. You see, lad, although I have made money fast, and am, I expect, one of the richest men in Lancashire, I am only ’Owd Amos Lancaster,’ plain and rough, and, as you may say, uneducated. Mind you, we are as good as others as think themselves better than we are. All the same, I am not a fool, and I can’t shut my eyes to facts. That is why, when I

saw you growing up straight, and clever, and handsome—yes, I will say it—I said in my heart: ‘My Baxter shall marry into an old family, and shall take his place among the great ones of the world.’ That was why I was disappointed yesterday when you didn’t bring it off with Evelyn Templeton.”

“What better is Sir William Templeton for being able to trace his ancestors back to William the Conqueror?” asked Baxter.

“I don’t think he is any the better, in a way,” the old man replied, “but there must be a satisfaction in knowing you can do it. But why are you asking such questions, lad?”

“I was thinking about Ned Stuttard, grandfather. I suppose he is regarded as one of the successful men in Lancashire, but his money didn’t seem to give him tuppenceworth of comfort last night. He was just breaking his heart over his dead wife, and the fact that he was a well-to-do man didn’t seem to affect him. Well, supposing he was twice as rich; supposing he was worth half a million instead of a quarter of a million. How would it affect him?”

Old Amos sat in silence for nearly a minute. Then he burst out half angrily: “Nay, there doesn’t seem owt in onything,” he almost shouted. Then he concluded: “But it’s the only thing to live for.”

“Then life is a poor affair,” asserted Baxter. “Besides, it won’t do.”

“What won’t do?”

“You told me a little while ago that you were happy with grandmother?”

“Ay, and I was, too,” and there was a quiver in the old man’s voice.

“Was she a good woman, grandfather? Tell me about her.”

“She wur a saint; just a saint,” the old man replied, “and if ever anyone went to heaven she did.”

“And do you ever think of meeting her again?”

“I did for nearly a year after she died,” replied old Amos. “The thought of meeting her again was, with the exception of the boy, Baxter, the only comfort I had. But these last few years the hope has somehow seemed to die out, and—and— But it’s no use talking of that now. Baxter, have you been frank with me?”

“What do you mean?”

“Have you told me why you didn’t ask you Templeton lass to wed you?”

“No, I have not told you all the truth; I only told you I couldn’t do it. Grandfather, did you see Dr. McAlpine yesterday?”

“I just saw him, and spoke to him just the same as I did to all th’ other parsons.”

“Did you see his niece?”

“Niece? Nay, I know nowt of no nieces. Now I come to think about it, though, I saw a lass walking with young Wallace, and someone told me she was the niece of Dr. McAlpine, the Scotch parson. What of her?”

“I am very much interested in her.”

“You don’t mean to say you got mixed up with a young nobody like that?”

Baxter shook his head. “She wouldn’t have me,” he said.

The old man laughed. “Don’t talk like a fool!” he said. “All the same, Baxter, you mustn’t pick up with a nobody like that. You must make a success in life. If you don’t, I shall be terribly disappointed. You see, lad, I want you to be happy.”

“How can one be happy?” asked the young man thoughtfully.

“By making a success,” declared old Amos. “By marrying the woman you love, and by bringing up a strong, healthy family of lads and lasses.”

“Is that the only way?”

“What is there beside?”

“Grandfather, I heard you say that when you and grandmother were first married you were poor?”

“Ay, we were in a small way, lad; but we were very happy—”

“Happier than you are now?”

Old Amos did not reply to this, but tears dimmed his eyes. Silence reigned between them for several seconds. Then Baxter went on: “You are spoken of as belonging to Wesley Chapel. You scarcely ever go now. Why?”

The old man got up from his chair like one in a temper. “It’s nowt in my line,” he exclaimed testily, “and the parsons talk such top water stuff that it’s not worth listening to,” and he left the room like one in a temper.

“Grandfather isn’t very logical,” mused Baxter as he filled his pipe, and prepared to go back to the town again. “I wonder why the mention of the Methodist Chapel made him so angry?”

At that moment old Amos returned again. “I shall not go down to the town today, Baxter,” he said. “I will leave it with you to settle that affair with Judsons, and if I were you, I would call and see Cronkshaw. We may as well keep on good terms with him.”



“All right, grandfather.”

“And look here, Baxter—Sir William Templeton upbraided me yesterday for never going to Templeton Court. He asked both you and me to call there today. I can’t call, but you might. He told me he cared nowt about etiquette, and things like that, and I am sure he would like to see you.”

“Would you like me to go there, grandfather?”

“Yes, I would. And settle it up, if you can, my boy, with you lass. I should like to see you happy before I die. And another thing, lad: take care of thesen. I know thou art a careful driver, but the roads are graisy, and accidents are constantly happening. I should have nowt to live for if onything wur to happen to thee, lad,” he concluded, and then before Baxter had time to reply, he again left the room.

It was nearly eleven o’clock when Baxter Lancaster left Barons Court. His talk with his grandfather had lasted for more than an hour, and although it seemed to him that it had led nowhere, it made him more than usually thoughtful. Ordinarily he paid but little attention to the deeper questions of life, and as for his own happiness, he seldom bothered himself about it. He enjoyed good health, he lived in a beautiful home, in the main he had such friends as he desired; and these things had given him pretty much what he wanted.

But today he was more than usually thoughtful. The events, especially of the previous afternoon and night, had caused hosts of questions to surge up in his mind.

Even although he told himself that he took life as he found it, he was, as we have said, more than usually thoughtful. As he had told Stephen Wallace the night before, he had, when he was in his teens, been fond of poetry and romance. He had read Shelley and had imbibed many of his notions. He had also read Byron, and although Byron had gone out of fashion and was but little read in the twentieth century, he was doubtless a genius of very high order. To Baxter Lancaster, at any rate, he had been for years a kind of prophet, and although he had of late thought less and less about him, he was much influenced by his sombre philosophy.

Two things stood out from among his experiences on the previous day. One was his meeting with Stephen Wallace, and the consequences of that meeting. Indeed, Baxter was more and more astonished at what had taken place. Usually he had been a self-contained young fellow, and slow in making friendships. Indeed there were but few men to whom he gave

confidences, or regarded as friends. Thus for a comparative stranger to come into his life so suddenly, and cause him to give him his friendship, was unprecedented; and Baxter, although his heart warmed towards the young minister, wondered if he had been wise in speaking to him so freely.

The other thing that stood out boldly in his experiences of the previous day was associated with, and almost a part of, what we have just mentioned. When he awoke on the morning of his twenty-eighth birthday he had never dreamed of being in love with Peggy Edgecumbe, yet the fact of seeing her with Stephen Wallace, and of catching the flash from her laughing eyes, had somehow made all the difference.

He could not understand his feelings for her. For that, matter, as he left the house and walked among the gardens before making his way to the garage, his conversation with her, and the feelings which had surged up in his heart for her, seemed unnatural and unreal. In any case, they had been repelled. Peggy Edgecumbe had seemingly regarded his love lightly. More than once he had recalled the conversation they had had together, and his reflections had caused mingled feelings to stir within him. He could not help reflecting either, that she had appeared to scorn him even while she confessed a liking for him. He had thought of her as a hoyden; spoken of her as a hoyden; yet, undoubtedly, she had shown depths in her nature which he had never realized.

What a wealth of meaning and of passion there was in her voice when she had refused his love! "The love of a lifetime!" she had said scornfully. "As though I could be satisfied with that!"

In spite of the fact that he had been thinking of her, however, he gave a start at seeing her standing by a bookshop when he entered the town a little later.

Almost unconsciously he jumped out of his car, and spoke to her.

"Seen that?" she queried, pointing to a book in the window.

"In Quest of Happiness," he read. "I suppose that is what we all are!"

"Have you read it?"

"No," he replied. "Do you know anything about it?"

"My uncle has it," was her reply, "and I read a few pages of it yesterday morning."

"Is it good?"

"You had better read it," she said.

"Are you busy this morning?" he asked after a short silence.

“No, I am free for an hour or so, at all events. Why do you ask?”

“Because I want a talk with you. Will you come for a ride?”

She hesitated for a second, and then looked at his face earnestly. “Yes, Mr. Lancaster,” she said, “I shall be glad of half an hour’s chat with you. I am afraid I gave you a false impression yesterday.”

Her words almost startled him. Surely she had not reconsidered the answer she had given him on the afternoon before, and wished to recall it! His heart gave a leap at the thought. A few seconds later they were in the car, and Baxter headed the machine for the open country.

“Mr. Lancaster,” she said earnestly, “I hope I did not give you a wrong impression yesterday?”

“It will give me more joy than you can imagine if you will give me a different answer,” he replied. “Can you?”

She shook her head. “It wasn’t of that I was thinking,” she replied. “I have been afraid lest I left you with a wrong impression as to my thoughts and feelings, and I do not want any misunderstanding.”

His eyes were fixed on the radiator cap, but he listened greedily for her to speak further.

“I wouldn’t give you a wrong impression for anything,” she went on, “and I am afraid I did. I—I told you that I thought I liked you. Please forgive me for speaking so frankly, but—”

“Don’t say that,” he pleaded. “Please don’t try to recall the one pleasant thing I was able to get from you.”

“I like you very much,” she replied frankly, “but not in the way you mentioned to me last night. Have I made myself clear?”

He waited a few seconds before replying. “Yes,” he said, “I think I understand. Thank you for being honest, anyhow.”

“I want to be,” she replied. “Last night after I left you I thought over what had taken place, and I was afraid I had been very rude to you. I realized that you had done me a very great honor, and while I could not do what you asked, I did not want you to think me unappreciative of what you had said.”

“Please don’t talk about it,” he replied. “It wasn’t of that I was thinking. I had a great hope when I saw you just now, and when I asked you to come with me that you would have been led, after consideration, to give me a different answer.”

“No,” she replied, “I couldn’t do that. Even if I cared for you in that way, which I don’t, I could say nothing different.”

“Are you sure?” he pleaded.

“Mr. Lancaster,” cried the girl, “I was in earnest just now when I said I wanted a chat with you. I do very much. I want to prove to you that my answer was not given lightly, and that however I might feel towards you, I couldn’t come to another decision.”

They had by this time reached the summit of a high hill, which might also be termed a dividing-line between the industrial and the rural districts of that part of Lancashire. On the one side were the mill chimneys and smoky skies; on the other was a beautifully wooded country, verdant and comparatively unbesmirched by the grime of commerce.

Baxter Lancaster was silent for a few minutes after this and then he turned and looked at her steadily. “I am afraid I don’t understand you,” he said.

“I know I must have seemed an awful prig,” she went on, “but, really, what I said means a lot to me.”

She hesitated a few seconds, and then went on: “Let me tell you about someone I know. A man, a very clever, scholarly man, came into a certain district some years ago, and made the acquaintance of a lady, a widow with one little girl. I am given to understand that he was one of the most scholarly and intellectual men in England. He was a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and had a wide acquaintance, not only with the classical scholars of the country, but with the scientists of several European countries. He was an agnostic, if not an atheist, and, in a way, ridiculed faith in the supernatural. He laughed at the idea of God, save as a great unknowable force. He ridiculed the idea of immortality, and mocked the faith of those who believed in a life to come.”

She hesitated again, as though she found it difficult to proceed. Then she said: “The widow lady of whom I spoke to you just now was also an intelligent and well read woman, but her scholarship paled before his. He asked her to marry him, and at length persuaded her to do so. In three years he had destroyed her faith. He had seemingly swept aside her every argument as worthless, and when his death took place five years ago, she was as great a materialist as he had been.

“As a consequence, the lady’s child, a little girl, was brought up in an atmosphere of agnosticism. She was never taught to pray; on the other

hand, she was led to believe that all those who held to the Christian faith, lived, as far as intellectualism and scholarship are concerned, in the backwater of life. Indeed, she was taught that a faith in Christianity was a sign of a feeble intelligence. You can understand that, can't you?"

"I think so," replied Lancaster.

"But this little girl remembered many things. She remembered her mother before her own father's death—and her own father was a man of faith, and believed implicitly in the Founder of Christianity. He made his wife believe, too, before his death, that they would meet again, and, as a consequence, his death was rid of half its sting. His wife believed, in spite of everything, that this was only the beginning of life. When she married again, however, as I said just now, her second husband killed this faith, and laughed at what he called a childish fable. Forgive me for bothering you with all this, but I really wanted to tell you about it, for it explains what I told you last night."

Lancaster looked at her steadily, but did not speak. He thought he understood what was in her mind.

"Of course you will have guessed by this time," she went on, "that I was the little girl referred to, and that my mother was the lady who married an agnostic husband. It seems mean of me to tell you about it, and yet in a way I feel I must. Mr. Lancaster, I haven't an atom of faith in the Christian religion. But, oh, it would be grand if it were true I I tell you I'm sick to death of the talk of these so-called scientific people. It leads nowhere, and it leaves one with a great heart hunger. My stepfather, through killing faith in my mother, killed faith in me. And while I can find no answer to the questions they raised as to the truth of the Christian religion, it leaves me with a great heart hunger which I can't describe.

"That was why, when directly after coming here I was told about you, and about the way you regarded such things, while, on the one hand I was led to think very highly of you, on the other I could not help thinking of you with a kind of pity."

"Why?" asked Lancaster.

"I can't answer that. I only know that it was 50. Perhaps I am judging you by myself, and am, as a consequence, doing you an injustice; but I feel now as I felt last night, that neither you nor I live half our lives. The greater part of us is dead, and I for one, at all events, loathe the very idea of linking

my life to that of a man who has no thought of a life but that which can last only for a few years.”

“But mustn’t we take life as it is?” replied Lancaster. “After all, it is no use buoying ourselves up by a belief in childish fables.”

“How do we know they are childish fables?” cried the girl indignantly. “I know I have argued that they are, and I have laughed at the idea that the story of Jesus Christ is true, but— Can we go back now, Mr. Lancaster? I promised my uncle that I would not be late for lunch.”

“And is there no hope that I may some time persuade you to alter your mind?” asked Lancaster presently, as they again neared Baronstown.

“Not the slightest,” replied the other, and Lancaster thought he detected a tone in her voice which made him indignant, if not angry. After all, who was this Peggy Edgecumbe who spoke with such assurance? And although he was polite to her when at length he set her down at her uncle’s door, he was none the less angry at the way she had dismissed him.

## 7. In Quest Of Happiness

LANCASTER again found himself standing at the bookshop window, and looking at the book which Peggy Edgecumbe had pointed out to him.

“In Quest of Happiness,” he read again. “I wonder what the thing is like?”

“Yes, we have sold several copies,” replied the bookseller in answer to the questions he propounded. “In fact, the publisher’s traveler was here yesterday, and he told me that they had sold three large editions. Reviewers speak of it as one of the most striking books which has appeared for many years.”

“What is the line of argument?” asked Lancaster.

“I haven’t read the book myself,” replied the bookseller, “but I suppose the line of argument is entirely new.”

“How?”

“Well, for one thing, the writer disclaims any belief in Christianity, or indeed of religion in any form. At the same time, he maintains that happiness is within reach of all, and argues that unless a man is happy he is failing to fulfill one of the great duties of life.”

Lancaster bought the book, and went out of the shop.

A few minutes later he sat alone in his private office, and was eagerly reading the book he had bought.

After reading for some time, however, he threw it from him in anger. “And that is a specimen of a well reviewed book!” he cried. “That is giving to the world an unanswerable case!”

He sat back in his chair, and gave himself to thought. “Yes,” he reflected at length, “happiness is what the whole world is striving after; but I am hanged if I can see how it can be obtained! Take my own case. I am twenty-eight, and I am well and strong. I have scarcely ever had a day’s illness in my life. I live in a beautiful home; I am one of the richest young fellows in Lancashire, and yet— No! I am anything but happy! But why shouldn’t I be?”

He went over the previous day's proceedings. He remembered what his grandfather had said; remembered, too, what scores of well-wishers had urged, but he knew he was not happy. Was it because the girl to whom he had proposed marriage had refused him? Doubtless that might partly account for his feelings, and yet at the back of his mind he knew that it was not a sufficient reason.

He remembered what she had said to him that morning; remembered the tones of her voice; remembered the look which she had bestowed upon him. Yes, in his heart of hearts he believed he was more angry by what she had said to him than sorrow-stricken. He wondered if he was in love with her after all. Of course she was a handsome, fascinating girl, and he could not help being struck by her beauty as she had told him the story of her mother's and her own life. But, after all, a fellow such as he should not whine because a girl had refused him.

“Shall I wasting in despair,  
Die because a woman's fair?  
If she be not fair to me,  
What care I how fair she be?”

He quoted this with a kind of gusto, and yet he did not feel satisfied.

Presently he remembered his grandfather's words. The old man had besought him to seek Evelyn Templeton's hand in marriage. He had said that only in getting a suitable wife could a man find happiness; he had told him, too, that never until his grandmother had come to live with him had he been contented and happy.

He knew he did not love Evelyn Templeton, yet he wondered whether his grandfather were not right. He called to mind the conversation he had had with Peggy Edgecumbe that very morning; remembered, too, the tones of finality in her voice as she had told him that they would never be any more to each other than they were now. Was he, then, to go through life companionless, wifeless—a disappointed wooer? At any rate, he would seek for happiness on the lines which the book he had been reading taught him. Just as the heroes of romance went out to seek for adventure and romance, he would seek for happiness, and if it was possible to find it, he would find it.

But no, he would not motor up to Templeton Court that day. It was only a dozen or so miles away, and he could reach it in half an hour, but he



couldn't make up his mind to take the journey. It would be a mockery if he did.

These thoughts had scarcely passed through his mind when his grandfather's car drove up to the office door, and the old man alighted. "You didn't come home to lunch," old Amos reminded him.

"No, I didn't feel like lunch. I just had a bite here."

"I had a telephone call from Templeton Court a few minutes ago," the old man said. "Sir William rung me up, and asked if you and I could come up there to tea this afternoon. He spoke in a very friendly way. He asked me to waive ceremony, and come as a neighbor. He said he knew that in accordance with strict etiquette they should pay a 'thank you call' for our hospitality yesterday, but he hoped that I should not think about such things and that you and I would come."

"You can easily go without me, grandfather," replied Baxter. "Why don't you?" "I don't want to, lad. I am too old for that kind of thing, but you are not, and I as good as promised Sir William that you should come."

"No, surely not!"

"Ay, but I did. I fancy Sir William was in the doldrums; I judged as much from the way he spoke. I reckon, too, he has lost some money, for he said he wanted a talk on some things about which he regarded both you and me as authorities. Will you go, lad? I wish you would."

Baxter did not speak at once. He had just made up his mind that he wouldn't go to Templeton Court that day, and thus so quick a *volte-face* did not please him. "Why are you so anxious about it, grandfather?" he asked at length.

"Ay, lad," and the old man's voice shook a little. "I've been reckoning things up since you left this morning, and I realized that I am very old, and can't last much longer; and I should like to see you settled before I die. Don't mistake me, lad. It isn't only because of Sir William's old name and old connections that I am thinking about it; we are as good as he is, and, as I told you yesterday, we could buy him up ten times over, and then have a bit to spare. All the same, Evelyn is a good match, and I would like to see you settled down before I die."

Baxter had it on the tip of his tongue to tell him about Peggy Edgecumbe, but he reflected that it would be no use. The girl had refused him. More than that, she had been very definite in her statement that she could never, think of him in the way he desired. Why should he bother

about her, then? As for telling his grandfather what he had said to her, why worry the old man? At least, it was up to him to make him as happy as he could.

“You will go, lad won’t you?” queried old Amos.

“If you really wish me to, grandfather. But mind, I have nothing to say to Evelyn Templeton. As I told you yesterday, even if she would have me, which I very much doubt, she is not my sort.”

“Go and see her, anyhow, lad,” pleaded the old man. “Surely a lad shouldn’t need persuasion to go and see a bonnie lass!”

In spite of himself, his grandfather’s words weighed with him. Not that he meant to propose to her, or anything of that sort, but, at least, he could fall in with the old man’s wishes.

Besides, he was in a strange humor. He still felt sore at the thought of Peggy Edgecumbe refusing him, and, in a way he could not understand, he wanted to make her feel that, even although she refused him, there were others, more sought after than she, who wanted him.

Looking at his watch he saw that it was only half-past three, and, ringing the bell, he gave an order that his car should be brought to the office door.

“Will you take a chauffeur, lad?”

“No,” replied Baxter. “I’d rather drive myself.”

“Wouldn’t it look better to take a man with you?” persisted old Amos, and he looked at his grandson anxiously.

Baxter realized at that moment how dear to him the thought of his marrying Evelyn Templeton had become. “No, I would rather drive myself,” he repeated, as he went into the mill-yard.

“All right, only take care of yourself,” pleaded the old man. “Remember, as I told you this morning, if anything happened to you I should have nothing to live for.” There was a plaintive tone in his voice, and it rung above the din and noise of the mill in Baxter’s ears as he left the town.

Twenty minutes later Templeton Court appeared to his view. It was a fine old house, and much of it was very ancient. Indeed, there were parts of it, which were well-nigh in ruin, which went back to Tudor times, and although the habitable part of the place was of a later date, the architects of the period had shown great skill in causing the comparatively new to blend with the old.

Nevertheless, there were signs of poverty everywhere. The gardens were under-staffed; the buildings needed attention. Baxter saw, on all hands, the

want of money. He knew that the Templetons had for a long time resisted the encroachments of the new spirit which had become widely felt in Lancashire, and they had looked down, or tried to look down, upon what they called parvenus who, by means of their grit, and energy, and foresight, had made huge fortunes.

“Ah, Lancaster,” cried Sir William when he was admitted into the house, “I am glad to see you. Couldn’t your grandfather come? I was hoping from what he said when I rung him up an hour or so ago that he might manage it.”

“Please forgive him,” pleaded Baxter. “He will be eighty in September, and yesterday was more than usually exciting.”

“Yes, yes, I think I understand,” was Sir William’s reply. “You will tell him I am sorry he couldn’t come, won’t you? By Jove, Lancaster, you’ve come of a fine stock! There are not many people who have reached the age of eighty, and yet who are so keen and hale as your grandfather. I was saying as much to my wife and Evelyn just now.”

“I hope Lady Templeton and Miss Templeton are well?” Baxter managed to say. In spite of himself, his heart was beating violently.

“They are splendid, thank you. Evelyn has two friends with her. They drove over from near York. They were at school with her,” he added.

Sir William led the way from the hall as he spoke, and a minute later Baxter was shaking hands with Lady Templeton and her daughter.

Yes, he could not deny it, the greeting of the girl pleased him. All the more so because she was usually reserved, and, what his neighbors called, “standoffish.” The very fact that she unbent to him, and instead of being her ordinary statuesque self, showed suggestions of abandonment, could not help but have its effect.

“I want to have your opinion on those Argentine Electric shares,” said Sir William presently. “I got a letter from my broker this morning telling me I could buy with advantage just now, but as I am a poor man and haven’t much money to speculate with, I am anxious to know the opinion of those who know much more about it than myself. You have bought largely, I hear?”

“My grandfather has,” replied Baxter. “But I wired our broker this morning telling him to get rid of at least two-thirds of what we hold.”

“They stand at ten shillings above par,” objected Sir William.

“I know; but in my opinion they are more above par now than they ever will be again,” replied Baxter.

“Oh, do stop talking business,” cried Evelyn. “Not but what I like to hear you,” she added; “but father, for some reason or other, hates to talk with me about business.”

“Well, I do want ten minutes’ talk about money affairs,” Sir William said to Baxter, “so you and your friends, to whom such talk is no doubt weariness of the flesh, had better go out in the garden.”

They had finished tea by this time, and there was a great dome of blue sky outside.

“All right, we’ll go,” said Evelyn Templeton, “but mind, Mr. Lancaster, I Shan’t forgive you if you let father keep you very long.”

During the next half an hour Baxter was talking seriously with Sir William about money affairs. He quickly discovered that although the baronet was very keen to know the state of the money market, his information was not only painfully inaccurate, but that his grasp of matters appertaining to commerce was exceedingly weak.

“By Jove, Lancaster,” cried Sir William at length, “but you’ve let in some light on dark places, and have helped me more than I can say!” He went on to ask other questions, but before Baxter had time to reply Evelyn Templeton again appeared with her girl friends at her heels.

“You’re too bad!” she cried. “Here have we, for the last twenty minutes, been longing for and expecting you to come, and yet you have stayed here talking musty business with father! Besides, Selina and Helen Judson have to go right away. Their car is at the door. They say they must be back in time for dinner. Yes,” she continued, turning to Lancaster, “you may come with me and see them off, if you like. You can’t say after that that I am not forgiving!”

A minute later he was standing, bare-headed, by the side of the Judsons’ car wishing the girls a good journey, after which Evelyn Templeton caught his arm. “No, I am not going to allow you to go’ back to father just yet,” She said. “It’s true our gardens are badly looked after, but I want you to see some rare plants which came from somewhere in the Antipodes.”

Certainly she was very gracious to him, and her lips were wreathed with smiles. She looked very handsome, too, and Baxter could not help noticing what a fine, well-developed figure she had, and how gracefully she carried herself. And yet she unbent to him. She was no longer simply the statuesque

descendant of an ancient race; she was a girl with a girl's hopes and a girl's longings.

He felt her hand upon his arm, and although it rested there lightly, he rejoiced in the tingling sensation which ran up to his shoulder.

"I haven't congratulated you yet on the tremendous success of yesterday," she said presently. "Didn't you feel that it was good to be alive?"

"Of course," he replied. "How could it be otherwise?"

"I didn't think you looked happy," she said. "Weren't you?"

"Didn't I have everything to make me happy?" he evaded.

"Did you? What?" and she smiled at him dangerously.

"Weren't you there?" he couldn't help saying.

She took no notice of this, but still keeping her hand upon his arm, looked upon the ground. "I had a strange feeling," she said, "awful strange. You will tell me if it's true, won't you?"

"What was it?"

"I had a feeling that you wanted me to go away," she replied. "You didn't, did you?" She pressed his arm as she spoke, and there was an appealing look in her eyes. Evelyn Templeton was very dangerous at that moment, and if ever Baxter had thought of her as cold and irresponsible, he forgot about it. Looking straight at her, too, he saw that her lips were parted, and that her eyes were sparkling with expectation.

He wanted, more than he could say, to put his arm around her waist, to draw her to him, and to kiss those rosy lips. Perhaps she wanted him to, but if she did she was disappointed, for he made no sign.

"Oh, I do love this summer weather," she cried; "I think June is the loveliest month in the year, and I am happy! Aren't you?" and again she pressed his arm.

"You are very lucky," he said.

"How am I lucky?"

"I bought a book a few hours ago," he replied. "It was entitled 'In Quest of Happiness.' I haven't finished it yet, but, from what I did read, I gathered that the author's idea was that a very few people were happy. It was, he stated, everyone's duty to be happy, and that they should avoid everything and everybody who would make them miserable."

"Such as—?" queried the girl with a laugh.

“As I told you,” replied Baxter, “I haven’t finished reading it yet, but the writer considers that everything like religion, for example, should be avoided. He also suggests that what he calls ‘a sense of sin,’ is one of the greatest hindrances to happiness. Therefore, he argues, one should be able to do wrong, or what the world calls wrong, without bothering about it, because there is really no such thing as right and wrong.”

“And isn’t he right?” asked Evelyn.

“Is he!” cried Baxter. “I don’t know. I have old-fashioned ideas about right and wrong, and thus the book didn’t go far to convince me. The writer argues, for example, that it is perfectly right to lie, and that a great deal of unnecessary uneasiness is caused by people being afraid to tell whacking lies. Well, I can hardly say that I feel like that.”

“And do you hold to the old-fashioned ideas, Mr. Lancaster? I thought you had given them all up.”

“I thought I had until I read that book,” replied Baxter. “Have you given them up?”

“I don’t trouble about them,” replied the girl. “‘Take the easiest road’ is my motto.”

“You surely don’t mean that?”

“Why shouldn’t I? We have only one life to live, and, goodness knows, it is very short! Who is the writer of your book, by the way?”

“I have forgotten his name,” replied Lancaster, “but he is an American.”

“Anyhow, whatever he is,” and the girl spoke lightly, “I believe it is everyone’s duty to drink the cup of happiness to its dregs; to enjoy life to its very full, and to avoid everything which spells pain. There!” and she shrugged her shoulders impatiently, “let’s forget that sort of thing, and let’s be happy!”

“Isn’t that easier said than done?” replied Baxter. “Can happiness be called up from the vasty deep? to quote the great Bard of Avon.”

“Of course it can if you make the most of your opportunities,” was the girl’s reply.

Baxter looked at her again, noted her youth, her beauty; saw her lips invited his. Well, why not? Why should he not do as the girl suggested, and kiss them?

He called his grandfather’s words to mind. The old man had told him that Evelyn Templeton, beautiful as she was, and high born as he knew her

to be, was his for i the asking. Why should he not snatch at the happiness which offered itself to him?

She threw a spell upon him. After all, she was a, fascinating and beautiful woman, while he, although he; had traveled widely and seen much of the world, was still a reserved and unsophisticated young man. He was anything but a woman's man. Indeed, he had avoided them.

"What opportunities?" he asked.

Love-light shone from her eyes, while her lips—

"Ask her, Baxter; ask her this very day! Settle it up, my boy; settle it up at once!"

He remembered the look in the old man's eyes as he had i said this, and he, Baxter, was anxious to make him happy in his old age. Besides, Peggy Edgcombe cared nothing for him, she had told him so that very morning. Why then should he not—?

He heard a discreet cough behind him, and saw the angry look which flashed from Evelyn Templeton's eyes.

"Please, sir."

Turning, he saw that a manservant had followed him and was waiting to speak to him. "Yes, what is it?"

"Excuse me, sir, but you are wanted on the telephone. The man told me it was important, or I wouldn't have troubled you."

"Will you excuse me?" he asked Evelyn Templeton.

"I suppose I must. You will not be away long, will you?"

He looked at her inquiringly.

"I mean you will return quickly so that we can finish our conversation," and she looked saucily into his face.

He followed the servant into the house, and no sooner had he got away from her presence than he felt as though something had snapped in his brain. He felt, too, as though the spell which had been cast upon him had been broken, and he could not understand why. Neither could he explain the curious feeling in his heart.

The telephone message was more important than he had at first imagined, and it took him a long time to deal with it. One of his managers read an important letter to him which called for an immediate and important decision. Also there were three telegrams involving large sums of money which he had to answer.

“I am sorry for using your telephone so long, Sir William,” he apologized when he had finished. “I promised Miss Templeton to hurry back to her, too. She will find it hard to forgive my rudeness.”

“She has just come in,” Sir William informed him. “I expect she grew tired of waiting.”

“I will only forgive you on one condition,” she said when he apologized to her. “Will you grant the condition?”

“Let’s hear what it is first,” he replied.

“Don’t you trust me enough to agree without knowing? At any rate, I will only forgive you on condition that you do what I tell you. No, I am not going to take any excuse, or accept any subterfuge! Promise; promise right away!”

“What am I to promise?”

“That you will stay and dine with us. Say you will! I want us to finish our conversation,” and she laughed nervously.

He looked at his grey tweed clothes, and shrugged his shoulders in mock despair. “I expect you have others dining with you, haven’t you?” he asked.

“Only some fusty old friends of father’s and mother’s,” she laughed. “They needn’t bother us. Beside, if you can telephone messages about business you can telephone to Barons Court, and order your evening clothes to be sent over. No, Baxter, I am not going to take any excuse. There! You are vexed with me now, aren’t you?”

“I vexed? Why should I be vexed?”

“Because I’ve called you by your Christian name,” and Baxter saw the flush mounting her cheek.

“I have always regarded my Christian name as ugly,” he laughed, “but as you say it, it sounds like music. So how can I be vexed?”

“Telephone right away,” commanded the girl. “I am going to stand here and listen while you give your orders.”

“Perhaps I shall have something to ask you if I stay,” he said significantly. “Something difficult for you to grant.”

“Whatever you ask, Baxter, it shall be granted, even to the half of my kingdom,” was her reply.

A minute later he got into communication with his home, and told Chadwick to send on his evening clothes immediately. He felt as though he were taking a fateful step in doing this.

“Tails and white waistcoat, Mr. Baxter?” asked the man.



“No, only a dinner jacket and black tie,” was his reply, and somehow, although he could not tell why, he felt that what he had said was a barrier against a dangerous situation.

## 8. Baxter Hears Unfamiliar Words

WHEN BAXTER LEFT TEMPLETON COURT that night just after eleven o'clock and got into his car, he drew a deep breath. It seemed to him as though he had been like a man diving into deep waters, and had, after a long time, risen to the surface where he could breathe freely.

"More than once after dinner he had been on the point of making a declaration to Evelyn Templeton, but, as it seemed to him, some happening had taken place which made it impossible. They were only little happenings that appeared to hinder him, but they were sufficient, and when at length he drove away without having pledged himself, or asking anything fateful, he had a great sense of relief.

There was a strange look in Evelyn Templeton's eyes as she watched him drive away. It was a look partly of anger, partly of disappointment, partly of longing. "He has said nothing," she said to herself, when left alone she went over the events of the evening. "I gave him every opportunity, and yet something always seemed to happen at the wrong time. Still, things can't remain where they are, and he is bound to declare himself sooner or later."

But there was uncertainty in her eyes even as these thoughts flashed through her mind and had anyone been watching her at that moment, he would have said that she looked years older than she was generally believed to be. She had ceased to be a Winsome, laughing-eyed girl. Indeed, she had ceased to be a girl at all, and had become a cold, calculating woman.

Why she had fastened upon Baxter Lancaster I do not profess to explain, except that he was said to be one of the richest young men in Lancashire. More than that, he was quite good looking, and having gone to a good public school as well as passed through an ancient University, he would bear a favorable comparison with young men of her own class.

In addition to this, both her father and mother had formed a very favorable opinion concerning Baxter, and the fact of his good looks, as well as his knowledge of the commercial life of Lancashire, had done much to lead Sir William Templeton to think well of him.

"If he is as rich as he is said to be, he could easily put this place on a good footing again," he reflected; "and, better than that, he could put me in the way of making money easily. It is a horror that I should be put to such straits to make a little money. Why, good Lord! people of our class, in my grandfather's days would never think of hob-nobbing with men of old Amos Lancaster's order, while here am I scheming as to how I can make his grandson propose to my daughter. Still, what's the use. We live in topsy-turvy times, and, after all, Baxter Lancaster is as much a gentleman as any Templeton that ever lived; and, come to that, he has five times the brains."

When Baxter reached Barons Court that night he found Chadwick sitting up for him. Chadwick was the man who looked after his grandfather's comfort, and had been employed two years before.

"There was not the slightest need for you to have waited up, Chadwick," Baxter greeted him.

"Mr. Lancaster told me to, sir," the valet replied.

"Why, isn't he very well?"

"Yes, sir, he is quite well, but he asked me to wait up for you, and to tell you that he would like to see you before you went to bed. Mr. Wallace called about an hour ago, too, sir, and told me to tell you that he wanted to see you."

"Mr. Wallace?" queried Baxter.

"Yes, sir. The Reverend Wallace. I think he had something important to say to you, sir, but he didn't tell me what it was. Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

For answer Baxter sent the man to bed, and made his way into his grandfather's room.

"That you, Baxter?"

"Yes, grandfather. Chadwick said you wanted to see me,"

"Ay, I did. For one thing I wanted to be sure that you got home safely, and for another—How did you get on, Baxter?"

"All right," replied the young man.

"Did you kiss her?" Old Amos leered questioningly; at his grandson.

“No,” replied Baxter. Old Amos sighed. “I was hoping you would have fixed it up,” he said. “When I wur your age I loved to kiss your grandmother.”

“Wasn’t that because you loved her!” asked Baxter.

The old man looked at him like one startled. “And don’t you love that Templeton lass!” he asked, looking at him keenly. “Nay, lad, come here, and let me look at you more closely.” He switched on another electric light as he spoke, and its glare fell fiercely on his grandson’s face. “Nay,” he said like one communing with himself, “perhaps it wouldn’t do after all.”

While Baxter sat at breakfast the following morning a servant entered the room. “You are wanted on the telephone, please, sir.”

“Yes, who’s there?” he asked as he stood at the telephone a minute later.

“This is Wallace—Stephen Wallace.”

“Good!” replied Baxter. “I was told last night that you had been here, and I was going to call on you this morning. What is it?”

“I will call, if I may, say, in half an hour’s time,” and there was a bright light in Lancaster’s eyes as he listened.

“Splendid!” he said as he hung up the receiver.

Half an hour later the two men sat facing each other, Baxter was wondering why his visitor looked so perturbed, “What is it, Wallace?” he asked.

“I know you hate such things,” replied the young minister, “but old Ned Stuttard—”

“How is he?” broke in Baxter.

“Dr. Black told me last night that he feared for his reason,” replied Wallace.

“His reason! Surely you can’t mean that?”

“Unfortunately I do. I had no idea that he and his wife were so much to each other, or that he depended upon her so implicitly. It is really pathetic, man. He goes around the house like one demented. He is all the time calling: ‘Eliza! Eliza! Speak to me, Eliza!’ The great thing which troubles him is that he hasn’t the slightest hope of ever seeing her again. He stands by the side of her open coffin for hours at a time looking at her, and I really am afraid for his reason.”

“Poor old Ned!” said Baxter sympathetically. “I wonder what one can do for him?”

“That’s why I came to you last night, and why I have come here again this morning,” replied Wallace. “The funeral is on Saturday, and he wants you to be there.”

“I!” replied Baxter, in dismay. “I haven’t been to a funeral for years, and I hate the very thought of it. I know of nothing under heaven more ghastly!”

“I am sure old Ned would think it kind of you if you did,” persisted Wallace. “You see, he is anxious to pay his wife every respect. At least, that’s how he looks at it, and so, as he terms it, he wants a big funeral. His desire is to get a few young men from the town whom he knows, to act as bearers, and to take the coffin from the hearse into the church and out again.”

“My God!” cried Lancaster in dismay. “You don’t mean to say he wants me to be one of them!”

“He is also anxious that a special service shall be held in the church next Sunday morning,” went on Wallace, “and he especially wants the bearers to be there. As you know, I wouldn’t have spoken to you about it if he hadn’t spoken so explicitly, and he was especially anxious about you. As you remember, you went to the house with me on the night she died—and I verily believe that if you refuse—— As I told you just now, I am anxious to do everything I can,” persisted the young minister, “and as he is anxious to have that sort of thing——”

“Yes, yes,” broke in Baxter eagerly. “I’ll do it! But tell me more about it; give me particulars of what you want me to do!”

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Every fiber in Lancaster’s being revolted against what he was called upon to do and although he stood with several other young men outside St. George’s Independent Chapel waiting the arrival of the hearse, he hated beyond all words the part he had to play.

Perhaps he hated it all the more because his grandfather was in the procession of conveyances which drew slowly up to the church door. He knew how the old man felt his age; knew that he realized the shortness of time which must elapse before a similar service was held in connection with himself. “And there is no escape from it!” Baxter thought savagely. “As the old gravedigger said to me yesterday, we must all come to it.’ Good God Almighty, what a ghastly thing life is!”

I am not describing what took place at St. George's Chapel in Baronstown, Lancashire, that morning because I have pleasure in doing so. For my own part, I would much rather write of youth, and the joy of life, but I have to take facts as they are. After all, a man is a coward who, in the flush of his strength and vitality, is afraid to face death. Besides, I have to tell of what took place that day because of the effect it had upon the young man I have tried to describe, and who for years I have known intimately, and loved much.

At length the hearse stood at the door, and Lancaster, with the others, carried the remains of Eliza Stuttard towards the spot prepared to receive the coffin immediately before the communion rails.

His mind was in a kind of maze as he found his way down the church aisle. What was he doing? What was the meaning of it all?

He had known Eliza Stuttard ever since he had been a boy, and, in a way, he had had an affection for her. Could it be that she was dead? Dead! Was that something which he helped to carry in the coffin really Eliza Stuttard?

His whole nature revolted against the thought, and yet while revulsion filled his being, he could not help thinking of her as dead.

But what a waste, what a mockery life was! A few years of struggling, hoping, enjoying, and suffering, to be followed by—this! Could it be possible that the Creator—if there were a Creator—would give life to the world, life with all its hopes, its possibilities, its struggles, its failures, its successes, its longings—life that was constantly stretching out after something indefinable but, in a way, glorious, only to mock us?

He and the other young men laid their burden on the trestles before the communion rail, while the mourners silently found their way into the church. Away in the distance the great organ discoursed solemn music.

Baxter looked curiously around the church.

Yes, it was a fine building. It was said in the town that although it was one of the smallest congregations in Baronstown it was, at the same time, one of the wealthiest. No money had been spared in erecting this edifice, and he could not help admitting that the place was very stately and very finely proportioned.

He gave a quick glance at the young men who like himself had obeyed old Ned Stuttard's behest, and acted as bearers there that morning. He knew nearly all of them. Some of them had been schoolboys with him. Had they

the same thoughts as he had? Were they as angry as he was? Their faces gave no signs of it, anyhow.

He turned towards the mourners who were slowly finding their seats in the center of the church, while the side pews and the galleries were being filled by the people of the town.

A minute later he found himself held by the look in old Ned Stuttard's eyes. There was something awful about it. What it was he could not tell, neither did he try to explain. But although the look was awful, there was something also tremendous in it!

He could see how the man was suffering; how every fiber of his being was being tormented by the thought that he was there to bury his wife, and yet there was something besides which he could not understand.

Yes, his eyes were awful, just awful! And yet—

He saw wonder, he saw yearning in them—and there was more than wonder and yearning; there was what he had first took for hope, and yet was not quite hope.

A great hush fell upon the people who filled every inch of space in the great church. The solemn notes of the organ grew quieter and quieter, and then died away altogether.

“I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.”

A cold shiver ran down Baxter's back as he heard. Great God! What majesty there was in the passage! It was as far above the petty little doubts and fears of life as the sun was above the earth!

Baxter hadn't heard the words for years, not indeed since the days when he was at Cambridge. Never since he had left had he been to church. It was all a played out fable—a piece of mockery!...

But, great God, it was fine!...

He had never heard Stephen Wallace preach. For that matter, he had never known him in his capacity of minister at all. Thus there was something strange in hearing his voice sounding out over the church...

Yes, he had a fine voice, too. More than that, he evidently felt the inwardness of the great words he read...

Of course they were not true. They were simply a part of the fable of Christianity, which he had discarded years ago. But, great God Almighty, wouldn't it be grand if they were true! What would old Ned Stuttard give if

he knew they were true! What would the world give to be sure of some great Life towering above the petty experiences of the present, giving confidence, and peace, and victory!

Yes, he was no longer sorry that he was there that morning. Of course the experience was painful; it was ghastly, but he was glad he had come. Perhaps, he did not know, but perhaps the service would give a kind of relief to poor old Ned Stuttard who was grieving so intensely because of the loss of his wife.

He was glad, too, to see his new-found friend officiating. Of course he would rather have heard him for the first time on some more pleasant occasion. All the same, in a way he could not understand, he felt glad that the first words he had heard him utter in public were those great words which Jesus was said to have uttered to Martha near the graveside of her dead brother.

Yes, Stephen Wallace was a handsome fellow, too. Wearing his Geneva gown, with his M.A. hood over it, accentuated his tall, stalwart appearance, and gave everything a sense of dignity.

His voice rang out again:

“For all the saints who from their labors rest,  
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,  
Thy Name, oh Jesus, be for ever blessed.  
Hallelujah!”

There are few parts of the country where the people can sing better than in Lancashire, or where there is more musical feeling. St. George’s Chapel had a fine choir, and they were there that morning in full force. But that was not all. Representatives from nearly every choir in the town were scattered here and there over the building, while practically all the congregation took up the strains of the hymn which Stephen Wallace had announced.

It was a note of triumph, too; it was a pean of victory. There was no suggestion of a wail of despair; no suggestion of the sadness of death.

Baxter Lancaster began to wonder if, after all, he had not been mistaken. Probably many of these people might be singing without conviction, and ’ perhaps without realizing the meaning of the words. But there were some who realized it. He believed that the man who wrote the hymn realized it, too.



Verse after verse was sung, each one finishing with a triumphant shout “Hallelujah,” and as he listened he more and more felt what a glorious thing it would be if death could be looked upon as Bishop Howe, who wrote the hymn, felt.

They came to the last verse:

“From earth’s wide bounds, from ocean’s farthest coast,  
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host;  
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
Hallelujah!”

Again Baxter looked towards the spot where he had noticed old Ned Stuttard, and as he continued looking he felt almost frightened. Was that madness in his eyes? Had the fears of Dr. Black, the medical man, come true?

No, it was not madness he saw there, but there was something beyond the power of words to explain. What it was he could not tell, but it was awesome. It was more than awesome, too. It suggested vision, and more than vision.

Then Baxter forgot Ned Stuttard, for looking farther back in the church he saw his grandfather. Old Amos, like many others, had joined in the procession that morning because he wished to show sympathy with a fellow townsman in his troubles. But no one knew what the old man felt. More than half a century had passed since he had buried his dead wife. He had been young then, while now he was old; very old; but he had never forgotten the feelings which had possessed him that day.

Sad as the occasion was, many in the church caught the spirit of Bishop Howe’s great hymn; caught, too, the triumphant tones of the music as they sung the verse which I have just set down. A mighty volume of sound filled the building. It might seem as though the multitude who were gathered there that day, and sung with such a suggestion of victory, might have been a conquering army, rather than a people who had come there to mourn with the man who was stricken by the loss of his wife.

But Baxter was sure that his grandfather scarcely heard the hymn. In the old man’s eyes was a faraway look as though he were dreaming of past days, and past memories. Tears were trickling down his face, too; tears which told not of the joy of victory, but of sorrow, hopeless sorrow.

The service proceeded.

“Surely,” thought Baxter, after Stephen Wallace had read the verses at the close of the chapter in St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, “this is not the way funeral services are usually conducted. Why, the man seems not only to believe, but he apparently has a great confidence that Eliza Stuttard is alive!”

He was so situated that he commanded a view of nearly the whole building. He watched Ned Stuttard’s face as the old man followed the young minister’s words; saw, too, that his grandfather was listening keenly and attentively.

Then his own heart gave a bound, for among many who crowded the side pews of the church, he saw Peggy Edgecumbe.

Even then he could not help comparing her with Evelyn Templeton, and he felt that they belonged to two different worlds.

What was the girl in the pew thinking about? Evidently she was paying little or no attention to what Stephen Wallace was reading, neither was there any light of faith in her eyes.

He called to mind what she had said to him on the day of the fête at Barons Court. “*Do you think I could be satisfied with the love of a lifetime?*” she had asked.

“*Do you think I could be satisfied with the love of a lump of clay? For that is all your love is, Mr. Lancaster!*”

He remembered the quiver in her voice as she had asked the question, and felt how her whole being went out with the question she had asked.

Yes, between this girl and Evelyn Templeton the poles lay, and the thought of asking the baronet’s daughter to be his wife seemed to become more and more impossible.

Nearly an hour later Baxter, with the other “bearers,” moved away from the graveside in the cemetery which stood some little distance outside Baronstown.

“What a horrible business this is,” he reflected, and yet in a way he could not understand, he would not have had it altered. He could see how such a service might be almost a horror, and yet as Stephen Wallace conducted it, it was a kind of inspiration. Even although he had not the slightest faith in what the words portended, the first words which Wallace had read in the church rang in his ears, and remained in his memory.

*What man, before or since, in the history of the world, had dared to announce such a thing? Either Jesus was a madman, or else—!*

He rode back in one of the cars which had been provided for the bearers.

“Mr. Stuttard is especially wishful that you should all go back to the house for lunch,” was the message he had received, and although it was prolonging the agony, he did as he was bidden.

It was a gloomy gathering that practically filled Ned Stuttard’s dining-room. The people who gathered there spoke in subdued whispers, and every man and woman seemed afraid to make a sound.

Perhaps this was because of the look in Ned Stuttard’s eyes; a look which seemed to make everything like cheerfulness impossible.

It was all over at length, and Baxter hoped to be able to find his way out of the house without further speech, when old Ned Stuttard came towards him.

“Baxter, lad,” exclaimed the old man.

“Yes, Mr. Stuttard.”

“You’ll be at the service tomorrow morning, won’t you?”

“What service?”

“Didn’t they tell you? I know what you feel about such things, but it seems to me all we can do for her. She believed in it, and, and—Great God Almighty, can nobody help me?”

The last words were a cry of despair, and although in some ways he looked hale and strong, in others he appeared to have come to the last ounce of his strength.

He held Baxter’s hand as if for support, and with quivering lips he rocked to and fro in his sorrow. “I’m better now,” he said presently. “I’ve nothing to live for, but I must hold on. I think she would have liked me to, so I’ll stick to it.”

“That’s right, Mr. Stuttard,” Baxter managed to say. “If there is anything I can do for you, let me know.”

“No, there is nothing,” replied the old man, “except that I would like to see all the bearers at chapel tomorrow morning. I can’t believe owt, or think owt. But she believed in young Wallace; believed, too, in what he said. He’s a grand lad, is Wallace.”

“Yes, he is,” affirmed Baxter.

“I don’t know what I should have done without him,” went on the old man. “I believe he’s kept me from going mad. It isn’t that I’ve believed in anything he’s said, but— Anyhow, I can’t explain it now. Thank you for being there, my lad. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Baxter looked at his watch as he left the house. It was past three o'clock now, and, being Saturday, the whole town would be idle.

Leaving the square in which Ned Stuttard's house was situated, he was on the point of turning in the direction of Barons Court, but stopped. He remembered that his grandfather would be there alone, and although he was very fond of him, he dared not be alone with him just then. He knew that the funeral service would have aroused memories concerning his grandmother. "The old chap has no more belief than I have," he reflected. "If only I had something to say to him which would cheer him I'd go to him, but I haven't."

He did not know at all why he did so, but he made his way towards the town as though drawn by some secret influence. He had not gone far, however, when he stopped. Coming towards him he saw Peggy Edgecumbe.

## 9. “And That Was Life”

“I SAW YOU at St. George’s Chapel this morning,” he greeted her.

“Yes,” she replied. “I was there.”

“I thought Stephen Wallace rather fine, didn’t you?” he ventured.

He did not mean to say this at all. He felt sure, too, that not only his words, but his manner of speaking them grated upon her. He had spoken as though the service were in the nature of a performance, and seemed to suggest that Wallace had performed quite creditably. Of course, this was furthest from his mind, but her presence had excited him, and he scarcely knew what he was saying.

“I have just left Mr. Stuttard’s house,” he went on.

“I went there at his request, and I have promised him that I will go to St. George’s Chapel again tomorrow morning, where, I am given to understand, a special memorial service is to be held. I am getting quite good, aren’t I?”

The girl looked at him strangely. He could not understand what her eyes conveyed, but there was no mistaking the tone of her voice. “Don’t!” she cried almost pitifully.

“You are right, Miss Edgecumbe,” he said, “I didn’t mean to speak like that. I don’t feel like that, either. Besides, I was thinking of other things. I was thinking of what we said to each other the other day, and, and—”

He looked around him like one helpless. Then he went on: “Are you busy?” he asked. “I mean this. We are close to the park, and I should love to have a, talk with you. There are lots of things I want to say to you.”

Evidently she was trying to make up her mind. There was doubt in her eyes, but there was also desire. “I should be very glad to walk with you in the park,” she replied, “under certain conditions.”

“What are those conditions?”

“That there shall be no further attempt at love-making; no hint as to what has passed between us.”

“All right,” he said, and his voice became metallic. “I’ll submit to any conditions for the sake of having your opinion.”

He led the way towards an open space. It was a plot of ground, between twenty and thirty acres, which his grandfather, old Amos Lancaster, had given to the town two years before, and was dignified by the name of “Lancaster Park.” Old Amos had swept down a good deal of slum property which had stood near some fields before it could be utilized as a park. At the entrance gates the girl stopped, and read an inscription which had been placed there.

“Forgive me,” said Lancaster, “I did not mean you to see that.”

“Why?” she asked.

The inscription stated that the park was the gift of “Amos Lancaster, Esq.”

“Because—oh, because it makes me out to be such a bounder! Please let us get away from it.”

She made no protest, but walked away by his side.

In spite of it being a fine afternoon, and a Saturday, there were comparatively few people in the park. An important cricket match was being played in the cricket field a short distance away, and thus they had the place almost to themselves.

“Do you know why I have consented to come here with you?” asked the girl as she led the way to a clump of trees under which a seat was placed.

“I know what I want to discuss with you,” he said, and there was almost an angry tone in his voice.

“What?” she asked.

“What you thought of the service this morning. No, I don’t mean what I suggested just now, or about the other night up at Barons Court when I had the temerity to say—what I did say. You told me then that your uncle seemed to be certain that he would meet your aunt’ again. I must confess, it interested me, and—”

He stopped suddenly like a man angry with himself. “Look here, Miss Edgecumbe,” he said, “let’s face facts. You told me the other night that the great reason you refused to marry me was because I could not offer you anything but the love of a lifetime; the love of a lump of clay. Your words have haunted me ever since, and while I cannot deny what you said, they made me angry, beastly angry. Would you mind telling me what you feel about this matter?”

“Why do you want to know?” she asked.

“Because—oh, a thousand things! Life is such a mockery; such a beastly mockery! After you left Barons Court on the night of the fête, I met Stephen Wallace. I invited him into the house, and we had a long chat together. I didn’t know him before that evening, and I got to like him. In fact, we are friends now. While we were talking a messenger came, saying that Mrs. Stuttard was dying, and would Stephen Wallace go and see her. Of course he went—and I went with him. I had no business to be there, and I felt it all the time. You see, when we got there Mrs. Stuttard was dead. All hope was gone, and old Ned was a raving maniac. I am telling you this in a very blundering way, but I can’t help myself. I am excited, and I have been almost overmastered today.”

“Why?” asked the girl.

“Because Stephen Wallace has got something which I haven’t got,” replied Baxter.

“What has he got?”

“Happiness, contentment, vision, hope, certainty, victory!” he almost shouted.

“And you have none of these?”

“Not one of them. As far as everything goes, seemingly, I am a thousand times better off than he is. I have splendid health, I hardly know what illness means, and as far as this world’s goods go, I have all that I need, and a hundred times more than I need; and yet I seem to have nothing.”

The girl did not reply. Perhaps she was ruminating on what he had said.

“Oh, I’ll be absolutely frank with you,” he went on. “I believed then that if you had answered me differently I should be a happy man.” He hesitated a second as if in doubt, then he went on: “In a way, and only in a way—Yes, I admit it—my happiness would only have been a superficial affair even if you had said yes. I know I am killing every chance I have got with you, but I must be honest. There’s something wrong with me, Miss Edgecumbe, and I want to know what it is.”

Please do not misunderstand the young man of Whom I am writing, or regard him as a lachrymose and unlikeable fellow. He, up to a few days before, had not been given to introspection, or to analyze life. But something, he knew not what, had started him thinking. Perhaps it was his birthday. Perhaps it was because of what his grandfather had said to him, or possibly it was because of his experiences at Ned Stuttard’s house.

Anyhow, he had become more than usually thoughtful and introspective, and while he was not conscious of any definite difference in himself, it was doubtless a fact that the bent of his character, which had shown itself when he was a boy, had become more pronounced. Baxter Lancaster was always more thoughtful than the ordinary boy, and the fact that as a youth he had reveled in such a poet as Byron, revealed the truth that his nature was tinged with melancholy. And yet, on the whole, after he had left Cambridge he was a fairly happy fellow. He was determined to take life as he found it, and not to philosophize about it. But the events of the last few days had in a sense done much to unsettle him, and had made him look at life in a way he had never looked at it before. "Is it worth while?" he had asked himself as he had roamed around the park on the morning of his twenty-eighth birthday, and although he had laughed at himself for asking what seemed afterwards such a foolish question, the thought remained.

Even as he sat and talked with Peggy Edgecumbe that afternoon, and although he felt like laughing at himself for talking about such matters with a girl who, a few days before, had scorned his protestations, he longed to hear what she would say. But she did not reply to him. Instead, she fixed her eyes on a distant hill, and seemed to be looking intently at it.

"What's the use of bothering?" she said aloud presently. "After all, we can't alter anything, and so we may as well take things as they are. But, oh, I do wish I knew my uncle's secret!"

"What secret?"

"I don't know. But I do know that although his heart must be almost breaking sometimes, and that although, in a way, he must be terribly lonely, he goes around the house singing for very joy. He says he knows that my aunt isn't dead, and he is sure that he will meet her again in a better world than this. That's the secret I should like to learn, Mr. Lancaster!"

"Do you believe in Jesus?" he asked, after a long and almost painful silence.

"No," and the girl laughed mockingly.

"Don't you think He ever lived?"

"I suppose so; but that is all such a long while ago, all so unreal. In any case, it's nearly two thousand years ago since He died."

"It was dashed fine, though!" burst out Lancaster after another silence.

"What was fine?"



“What Jesus was reported to have said to Martha at the graveside of Lazarus.”

“Do you think He said it?” asked the girl.

“Who would dare to invent it?” retorted the young fellow, like one musing. “There’s nothing else like it in the literature of the world. Fancy the greatest man that you ever knew, or heard of, declaring that he was, the resurrection and the life, and that whosoever believed in Him should never die, but have Eternal Life! Just fancy! My God! I wish I knew His secret!”

“What secret?”

“I don’t know. Do you know, on my way home from the cemetery today some passages which I had read long years ago haunted my memory. This was one of them: ‘I am come that they might have Life, and that they might have it more abundantly.’ What do you think of it?”

For answer the girl rose to her feet quickly. “I am going home,” she said. “I do not wish you to go with me; I would rather be alone,” and, without another word, she left him.

Lancaster watched her until she was out of sight, then he rose and made his way towards the town. What should he do with himself? Where should he go?

It was now about four o’clock in the afternoon, and the sun was shining brightly. All the mills in the town had ceased working, and the air was more than usually clear.

“I think I will go to the club,” he reflected presently. Then, looking at himself, he gave a laugh. He had not taken off the habiliments which he had worn at the funeral. No, he could not go to the club in such attire. And yet why not? Everyone would know where he had been that day, and, in any case, it didn’t matter. Besides, what was there to do if he didn’t go to the club?

At that moment he heard the sound of much cheering in the near distance, and he remembered that an important cricket match was being played in the cricket field. Yes, he would find his way there. He had been regarded as a good bat when at Cambridge, and had more than once played for his college. Why, in the name of Heaven, should he bother about the things which had been troubling him!

For the next two hours Lancaster was interested in following a keenly contested cricket match between Baronstown and another place a few miles away. As he watched, moreover, the thoughts which had been surging in his

mind during the greater part of the day receded into the far distance. The great question in life, in fact, the only matter that seemed worth thinking about was whether Baronstown Cricket Club would get more runs than the club of the neighboring town with whom they were playing.

At length the last wicket fell, and great cheering almost rent the air. Baronstown club had won by a clear majority of thirty-two runs, and thus placed themselves in a more secure position in the Lancashire Cricket League.

Although he could not tell why, the questions he had discussed with Peggy Edgecumbe seemed of less and less importance. Why need he bother about life and death? The sun was shining brightly; the blood of youth ran warm in his veins; he had life all before him, and he was one of the richest young fellows in Lancashire!

He laughed aloud at the thoughts which had been worrying him. Great heavens! At all events, there was time enough yet for him to bother about such things. Besides, hadn't Baronstown Cricket Club won its fifth match for the season that day? Men and girls all around him were laughing and talking as though they hadn't a care in the world. Well, why shouldn't they laugh and talk? Why shouldn't they be light-hearted? The sun was still shining, and the month was June. Until the following Monday morning, at any rate, they would have nothing to do; so let them flirt, and laugh, and love!

"Hallo, Mr. Baxter, been watching the cricket?"

Turning he saw a prematurely old man of between fifty-five and sixty years of age. "Hallo, George," he responded, "been watching the cricket?"

"Ay, it makes me think of th' owd days," replied the man. "It seems only yesterday since on such a day as this twenty-six year ago I wur playing for Lancashire against Yorkshire. Ay, cricket was cricket in them days. We beat Yorkshire, too, by an innings and forty-two runs. That was a day, that was!"

"You used to have a high batting average, didn't you?" remarked Baxter, wishing to please the old chap.

"I wur top for three years following in the whole county," was the proud reply. "Ay, George Brickett counted a bit then," and he sighed. "While now I can scarcely drag one leg after another my rheumatics is so bad. I am only fifty-seven either, but I expect they will be putting me under the sod soon."

“Nonsense! Don’t talk like that, George,” remarked Lancaster. “You are good for twenty years yet.”

“And even if I am,” replied the old man, “the time will surely come. I see,” he added, “that you’ve been at Eliza Stuttard’s funeral.”

“Don’t let’s talk about that now, George.”

“Why shouldn’t we?” replied the old man. “We’ve got to take things as they come. Ay, and Eliza wur a grand lass, too. I should have loved to have made up to her when Ned popped the question. But there! It seems but a week or two ago,” he went on, “sin’ I was young, and gay, and happy; while now—”

“Aren’t you happy now?” asked Lancaster.

“Ay, middlin’,” was the reply; “but youth is the time to be happy.”

“More than old age?” queried the young man.

“What do you think?” asked George. “When I wur twenty-five I weighed thirteen stone, and I hadn’t an ounce too much flesh. There wur times, too, when I made more runs than Grace. I didn’t know the meaning of being tired, while my lungs, my liver, my heart seemed as though they would last for ever. As for screwmatics, and that sort of thing, I knawed nowt about them! How could I help being happier then than I am now?”

In spite of himself, Lancaster had been led to think of the things which had been worrying him a few hours before, and he was impatient that it should be so. Still, he kept by George Brickett’s side as they made their way into the town.

“Mind, I’m noan complaining,” went on the old county cricketer, as they slowly made their way along with the crowd. “Although my screwmatics are terribly bad sometimes, and I am hardly any use in the world, I can still enjoy myself. I have my bit of baccy, and I love to watch the boys as they grow up. I mean to keep a stiff upper lip until I die, Mr. Baxter,” he added.

Baxter felt that he would have liked to have asked George Brickett questions concerning the deeper things of life which had been bothering him, but he refrained. What right had he to bring shadows on the pathway of this man’s life?

The crowd was now dispersing. Many of the people were finding their way into their cottages; others were climbing on to the trams in order to get to their homes in other towns; while many made their way to the railway station.

Again Baxter asked himself what he should do. He felt, to use a colloquial phrase, that he was at "a loose end." He knew that there were many houses in the district where he would be given a glad welcome, but he did not feel like going to them. He remembered that he had left a car in one of the garages at the mill. Why should he not take it, and drive to Templeton Court? He was sure that Evelyn Templeton would be glad to see him. But again, he could not tell why, but something forbade him.

"Hallo, Baxter!"

Turning he saw a young fellow about his own age. Edgar Riley his name was, and Riley's father was said to be almost as rich as old Amos Lancaster.

"What are you doing with yourself tonight?" asked Riley.

"Nothing," replied Baxter. "I am at a loose end."

"Come with me," suggested Riley.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to Manchester."

"Why, what's on?"

For answer Riley described a program which seemed to him to have a great attraction, but which did not appeal to Baxter in the slightest degree. At least, he was not that sort of fellow.

"No, thank you," he replied.

"Why not, you milksop?" laughed Riley. "You say you are at a loose end, so—"

Lancaster made his way to a social club in the town, and although he found very little pleasure in so doing, he accepted the invitation of some fellows he met there, and joined them in a game of bridge.

"I'm down in my luck tonight," remarked one of the players, as eleven o'clock struck, and Lancaster prepared to go home. "I've lost twenty-five bob."

"Terrible!" remarked Lancaster in mock sympathy.

"It's all very well for you to laugh at my losing twenty-five bob," replied the other. "You've made as much as I've lost, and even if you hadn't, you could afford to lose a thousand twenty-five bobs, and never think about it. Besides, you had all the cards."

"Yes, I was lucky," replied Baxter.

"Look here," suggested the other, "come in tomorrow night, and let me have my revenge. I dare not ask you home because mother has old-

fashioned ideas about ' playing bridge on Sundays, but there will be several chaps here."

Lancaster was on the point of saying yes when he remembered that he had promised to attend the memorial service at St. George's Independent Chapel on the following morning, and somehow, although he could not have told why, the two ideas seemed to clash. "Not tomorrow," he replied.

"Why not? You are not one of the fellows who keep Sundays, are you?"

"Not tomorrow," he repeated, and then made his way towards Barons Court.

He summed up his experiences since Peggy Edgecumbe left him that afternoon. He had been in quest of happiness. First of all he had gone to the cricket field where he had, with thousands of other people, watched the cricket match, and which, in a way, he had enjoyed. Afterwards he had had a talk with George Brickett, the ex-professional cricketer. Then he had gone to the town where Riley had invited him to "make a night of it" in Manchester. Then he had gone to the club where he had spent several hours playing bridge.

And that was life! He had been in quest of happiness. Well, what was wrong about it? Nothing was wrong. He had been engaged in innocent and harmless amusements; he had tried to spend his time in the most pleasant way possible.

When Baxter reached Barons Court that night he had come to the conclusion that life was a poor business.

"Baxter!" It was his grandfather's voice, and he made his way into the old man's bedroom. "Are you all right, lad?"

"Yes, grandfather. Why?"

"I was afraid something had gone wrong. I've been in th' house all the evening alone, and wondering why you didn't come home."

This was not like old Amos. He was seldom querulous, and never found fault with his grandson for staying out late. "Where asta' been, lad?" continued the old man?"

"I went to Ned Stuttard's place after the funeral," Baxter replied, "and had lunch there. Then I went on to a cricket match, after which I dropped in to the club for a game of bridge."

Amos looked at his grandson wistfully. "Ned was terribly cut up, wasn't he?" he said. "The doctor told me he was afraid he would go mad."

“I don’t think he will,” replied Baxter. “He seemed very anxious for me to go to the service at St. George’s Chapel tomorrow morning.”

“Did he, then?” asked the old man eagerly. He had caught hold of his grandson’s hand, and was holding it fast. “Baxter!” went on the old man presently.

“Yes, grandfather.”

“Did Ned say owt to you about seeing Eliza again?”

“He didn’t seem to know,” replied Baxter.

“It’s brought it all back,” exclaimed the old man. “Although it’s a long, long time ago, it seems only yesterday since I buried your grandmother, and, oh, I do want to see her again! Do you think I ever shall?”

Baxter was silent.

“Oh, my lad, the thought of becoming nothing is ghastly; just ghastly! I’d give all I possess at this very moment to know that when I die—it won’t be very long now— I shall meet your grandmother again in a land where there is no death. What does that Wallace chap think about it?”

“He seems to regard death, that is as far as he is concerned, as only an incident in life,” replied the young man.

“Ay, it would be grand if it were so!” exclaimed the old man. “But there! Good night, my boy. We must both get a good night’s rest so as to be at the service tomorrow morning.”

“I did not know you were going.”

“I wouldn’t miss it for anything!” cried the old man.

## 10. Old Amos Becomes Angry

WHATEVER MAY BE the attitude of Lancashire people with regard to church-going as a general practice, certain it is that they are in the habit of attending church in large numbers after a funeral. I do not quite understand the psychology of this, neither would I draw any definite conclusions from the fact; but after a fairly intimate knowledge of Lancashire life, I write with considerable confidence.

Although numbers of Lancashire people may, to all appearances, have entirely given up faith in religious practices and beliefs, they are meticulous in attendance at a place of worship on the Sunday following the funeral of any member of their family, no matter how distantly they may be related.

As a consequence St. George's Independent Chapel was full to overflowing on the Sunday morning following the funeral of Eliza Stuttard. Many of them had traveled from distant towns in order to be present, and even although these same people, even if they regarded church-going as a wom-out custom, followed the service with seeming interest, if not with reverence.

As it has been before stated, old Amos Lancaster was regarded as a member of the Wesleyan Church, which is usually designated " th' owd body " in Lancashire. Not that Amos was regular in his attendance. Indeed, it was a long time since the old man had occupied his pew in Wesley Chapel. Not that he had ever forgotten to pay his pew rent. The cashier of the Lancaster Mills sent a liberal check every quarter to the Trust treasurer of the Wesley Chapel. Nevertheless, the people in the town had a habit of saying that "owd Amos" had given up religion.

But he was at St. George's Independent Chapel on the Sunday morning following Eliza Stuttard's funeral; and not only was he there, but he was evidently deeply interested in what took place there.

"Owd Amos wears wonderful well," remarked one of the sidesmen to the caretaker in the vestibule after he had shown the old man to a pew. "But he can't last long; he is nearly done for."

“How long do you give him, Hezekiah?” asked the caretaker.

“Five years at the most. Ay, there will be a big funeral, when owd Amos dies.”

“Why should there be?”

“Weel, he’s been an employer of labor for more’n fifty year, while for the last twenty he’s been the biggest man in the town. He’s been Mayor three times, too.

Ay, it will be a big funeral when he dies.”

“Baxter’s a grand lad, too,” remarked the other.

“Ay, but Baxter’s not one of us, like Amos. He’s a sort of swell, and doesn’t make friends like his grandfather. Still, he’s a grand lad.”

Baxter had followed his grandfather into the church, and sat by his side during the service. It was a strange experience for the young man, for although he had been brought up in the town, he hadn’t attended an ordinary religious service since his return from Cambridge. But he was more than ordinarily interested on the present occasion. The events we have just narrated had caused him to be more than usually thoughtful, and while he had talked to no one about his thoughts, except to Stephen Wallace, he had come to church that morning in a state of mind not easy to describe.

“Does he really mean that, I wonder?” he reflected, as Stephen Wallace came out from the door of his vestry, and climbed into the pulpit, where for more than a minute he knelt reverently.

A second later he had taken himself to task for asking himself such a question. It was disloyalty to his friend; it was an insult to the man whom, during the last few days, he had learnt to trust implicitly. "

And yet it seemed strange to him. Did the man really believe that there was Anyone Who heard him! Anyone Who read his thoughts, and answered his aspirations?

He looked towards that part of the church where Ned " Stuttard sat, and was almost appalled by the expression on the old man’s face. His features were rigid; his lips were closely compressed; his eyes were hard and fixed.

What a difference there was between the old manufacturer’s face and that of the young minister! The latter’s eyes were lit up by a strange light; a light which told of vision, of faith, of realization. His face, too, in spite of the occasion, was radiant; radiant with joy; radiant because of the realization of something which could not be expressed in words.



When the organist had ceased playing the voluntary, Stephen Wallace gave out the first hymn. It was no dirge-like production; it was a shout of victory. Indeed, the whole service was not characterized by anything funereal, but by rejoicing.

Again as hymn followed hymn, lesson followed lesson, and prayer followed prayer, Baxter Lancaster asked the same question: "Is he really sure? Is this what he hopes to be true, or what he feels is true?"

He realized also that since the service had commenced a change of atmosphere had come over the whole place. When the first hymn had been announced there was an attitude among many of the worshippers which suggested indifference, if not unbelief; but as the service had proceeded the indifference had departed, and a reverent feeling held the congregation.

"He looks as though he had something to say," Baxter reflected, as he gazed into the young minister's face. "I wonder now—I wonder."

"What I have to say this morning," Stephen Wallace began when the hymn prior to the sermon had been sung, "will be said to those nearest and dearest to the gracious lady who has been taken from us, and especially to her husband who has been left alone. I shall have little or nothing to say to the general public this morning. What I have to say to them will be said tonight, if they care to come and listen to me. And I have something to say, too. I have a great message; a message which, if rightly understood, will make an infinite difference in the lives of the people."

Baxter did not altogether like this, and he asked himself whether Stephen Wallace was not using a rather vulgar means of attracting people to his evening's service. Still, he listened carefully, and although he was not at that moment sure of the young minister's motives, he was, nevertheless, deeply interested in what he had to say.

Stephen Wallace paused at the close of his last sentence like one in doubt, and then went on. "Perhaps, after all, I have said what is not strictly true. I have something to say this morning which not only has a message for those intimately connected with the lady who has been taken away from us, but to those, some of whom have come here out of mere curiosity, and others, perhaps, because of mere convention."

He paused a moment here, and looked out over the congregation as though he were curious to know what the people were thinking about.

"Since the night on which Mrs. Stuttard died," he went on presently, "I have talked with many in the town who were intimately acquainted with

her, and I have been staggered, simply staggered, by the hopelessness which prevails in the minds of the people. Baronstown lies at the heart of a great Christian civilization, but which is, to all appearances, a pagan civilization, if that is not a contradiction of terms. I want those of you who are here to be honest with yourselves, and to think carefully. Do you really believe that the dead live again? Yesterday you were over at the cemetery, or many of you were, and I saw some of you reading the names on the gravestones, the names of those who used to live in this town. On the gravestones are inscribed pious hopes and pious aspirations. Do you believe in them? Is one in ten of you convinced, really convinced, that if you were to die today you would enter into another life; a life greater than this; a life where you will be with those who are gone before?

“Such a question opens up a larger question; the greatest question in the world. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Because if you do there is no room for despair; if you do all night will end in morning; all pain will end in peace; all death will end in life! But do you believe it?”

Again the minister paused, and then looking at the pew where old Ned Stuttard sat, he said: “I have a tremendous message for those who loved Eliza Stuttard, and especially for her husband who mourns her departure. Eliza Stuttard isn’t dead! I mean it! Nay, I more than mean it. I am sure of it! 80 sure am I, that I feel the joy of resurrection in my heart; I know the meaning of life eternal now!”

The atmosphere of the church was tense with emotion; something, something for which no one could find words to describe, had gripped the congregation. There was such conviction in the minister’s voice; nay, there was more than conviction; there was certainty; such triumphant certainty, that for the moment, at all events, many lived in a realm that was strange to them; a realm which brought new joy, new meaning, new life. Indeed, it seemed at that moment as though the barriers which surround life were melted away, and they had entered into a life which was grander, diviner than that which they had known.

“I want to tell you something,” he went on. “I think Eliza Stuttard had a premonition that she was going to leave us. As many of you may have heard, she was far from well for two or three days prior to her departure. Indeed, she sent word for me to come and see her, and I gladly went. I say gladly, not because I have any special pleasure in visiting sick people as a general rule, but because it was always a means of grace to me to visit Eliza

Stuttard. She was not one of those women who lived in the realm of hypothesis. She had nothing to do with the word 'if' as far as her religion was concerned, but lived in the realm of certainty. That was why it was always such a joy to me to go and see her.

"Anyhow, on the morning of my visit to her she said this: 'Mr. Wallace, I don't think I shall live very much longer.'

"I made some sort of protest at this, but she would not listen. 'It's nothing to trouble about,' she said, 'and but for the fact that it will cause my husband pain, I shall be glad to go. Gladly have I lived,' she went on, 'and gladly shall I die, because I know that all is well.'"

He paused here, and looked around the congregation as though he were trying to understand what effect his words had.

"I want to repeat that," he went on, "because to me it means infinite things. 'Gladly have I lived,' she said, 'and gladly shall I die, because I know that all is well.' She spoke quietly when she said this, but there was conviction in her tones, the light of happiness in her eyes. To her God was no vague abstraction; Jesus Christ was not a mere myth. God was a great reality to her; He was as real to her as her own life. Jesus Christ was her personal Friend; One Who understood her; One to Whom she could tell her troubles and her cares, and, as a consequence, life was a great joy, and she could say: 'Gladly have I lived, and gladly shall I die, because I know that all is well.'"

Again Stephen Wallace paused, and seemed to be studying the faces of his congregation. There was no doubt about it, the interest in what he was saying was intense. To many it seemed like a voice from the other side of the grave.

"How many of us can say that?" went on the preacher. "I have, since Eliza Stuttard's death, talked with scores of people, and I have found that with the great majority of people over fifty years of age, life is regarded as a poor business. Young people under thirty are, in the main, gay, joyous, happy; but to those who have reached the summit of the hill and whose pathway is towards the west, life is, in the main, a dreary monotony. 'What's life to me?' said a man to me yesterday. 'It's a mere matter of eating, and drinking, and sleeping; a dreary round of working, and bothering, and getting up, and going to sleep. There's no joy in it, no victory, no gladness!'

"Now why is that? Why is it that you are not sure of God, and Christ, and Immortality? Why is it that life is not a great abounding joy, and death the opening of the gates unto Eternal Life? Why? I'll tell you. It's because the spiritual side of your life is dead. You are alive to material things; you are alive, it may be, to friendship; perhaps you are alive to the world of thought, and things which appertain to the intellectual world, but you are dead to the spiritual. Hence the word 'God' suggests only a great abstraction which may, or may not, be a positive reality. Christ is only a name in history which has little or no meaning. Indeed, to many Christ is less than a name in history. He is simply a myth, a fable!

"And what is the meaning of all this? To put it in a word, our spiritual life has become atrophied, which is another word for dead. Pardon a crude illustration. If you tie up one of your limbs and do not use it, that limb becomes dead. You need not bruise it, or break it, but you fail to use it, and it dies. You have a wonderful gift of sight, you possess the organs of sight, but fail to use your eyes, and the power of seeing dies. Go and live in a dark cellar for a few months, and the optic nerve withers, the power of seeing goes. The same is true of your spiritual life, of your spiritual sight. You neglect to use it, and it dies, and with the death of your spiritual life the realization of God dies, the knowledge of Christ dies, the knowledge of Immortality dies, everything spiritual dies. That is the great tragedy of the world; the death of those divine qualities in man which mean infinite joy, infinite triumph!"

Again he paused. He seemed to be talking not about something which he had carefully prepared, but about something which sprang from his consciousness; something which was born in his mind and heart even while he spoke. "The great thing which Jesus Christ gave to the world," he went on, "was Life. He declared this again and again. 'I have come that they might have Life,' He said, 'and that they might have it more abundantly.' 'But ye would not come unto Me that ye might have Life!' 'And these things were recorded that they might believe, and believing they might have Life through His name.'

"You see this, don't you? A child can understand it, it is so plain; and yet it is one of the profoundest truths in the world. Now let us get a little closer to our subject. I was talking with a man the other day who said that when he was thirty he lost his wife. She was carried away by an epidemic in this very town, and he told me that for years, although she was dead, he felt her

nearness to him, and he felt certain that he would meet her again. But as the years passed away he became more and more surrounded by the spirit of worldliness. He lived to make money; his god was the god of 'get on'; his god in life was the god of Success. Well, he gained the world, but he lost Life, and now he has lost all consciousness of his wife's nearness. He has no faith that he will ever see her again; his spiritual life has become 'atrophied; he is dead.

"That is the great tragedy of our times. People have a name to live, but they are dead. Through neglect and through disuse of the highest powers of their being, those powers have died, and thus when difficulty comes, when darkness comes, when trouble comes, when death comes they have neither life nor hope. Their spiritual Life has become atrophied; they are dead."

It was at this point that the great sensation of the service was realized. Old Amos Lancaster had been listening with keen attention to every word which Wallace had said. Whether he had agreed with him or not I will not pretend to say, but when the young minister told of the man who in his early days had lost his Wife, but who, nevertheless, felt her presence and had a consciousness that he would meet her again, a new expression came into his eyes, a new tensity came to his features. Then when Wallace went on to describe how the man gave himself to money-making, and how his god became Success, and how, as a consequence, he lost the joy he had known as a young man, he rose from his seat like a man in wrath.

"Baxter," he whispered to his grandson, "I never told him; I swear I never did!"

How many heard this I do not pretend to say. Certain it is, however, that old Amos's action caused a sensation in the service, and it was some little time before the quiet reverence, which had hitherto characterized everything, again reigned. At length everything came to an end, and the people slowly filed out of the building. What they thought of Wallace's address I do not pretend to say. Certain it is that many eagerly discussed it as they made their way out from the building.

Baxter was among the last to leave the church. As the others found their way into the aisles, old Amos remained in his pew, and Baxter decided to sit by his grandfather's side until he was ready to go.

At length the organist ceased playing, and the church was empty. "We'll go now, lad," old Amos said, as if desirous of escaping without speech with

anyone. But if this was in his mind, he was disappointed. When he reached the vestibule he found Ned Stuttard awaiting him.

“Wilt ’a come over to my house for a bit of chat, Amos?” asked the bereaved man, and Baxter could not help noticing how husky his voice was.

“Nay, nay, I must get home,” was the old man’s reply.

I wish you would,” persisted Ned. “By gum! he got us; he got us both! He got us ALL, for that matter!”

“Rubbish!” cried the old man. “I’ve never ’eerd that man before, and I’ll take good care I never hear him again. It’s rubbish! It’s rubbish, I tell you!”

“What’s rubbish?” persisted Ned Stuttard.

“The whole lot of it! You chap ought to be driven out of the town!”

“What for?” asked the other.

“What right had he to say such things? What right had he to go telling things like that?”

“Telling things like what?” and still Ned Stuttard looked eagerly at the other’s withered face.

“I’m altogether deceived in him,” snarled Amos. “When I met him first up at our place on the day of the fete I wur glad, and when Baxter brought him into the house I told him I hoped he would make a friend of him. But after he’s said what he’s said this morning, I’ve done with him!”

Several persons were in the vestibule, practically all of whom watched the two men, but none dared to go near enough to hear what they were saying. All saw, however, that old Amos was angry, while there was a light in Ned Stuttard’s eyes which nearly frightened them.

“Amos,” said the bereaved man, “I wur but a lad when your missus died, but I’ve always thought of her as one of the most beautiful women who ever lived.”

“Ay, she wurl she wurl” exclaimed old Amos.

“Do you think you’ll ever meet her again?”

The old man was silent at this. It seemed as though the terrible purport of the question made him dumb.

“I’ve felt as though my Eliza wur dead ever since the day she was taken from me,” went on Ned. “I felt as though I should never see her again, but after what that chap said this morning, I feel as though there is hope for me. It’s Life I want, Amos! Life! and, my God, I’m going to get that Life if it’s to be had I If what he said is true, everything is possible.” Although I am dead, I can find Life through Him Who declared He was ETERNAL LIFE!”

“Dost ’a believe that?” and Amos spoke so loudly that everyone in the vestibule could hear him.

“I’m going to make sure, anyhow,” exclaimed the other.

At that moment Stephen Wallace came into the vestibule. He had left his vestry, and had come out through the church towards the spot where the others were standing. Amos watched him as he came, and Baxter, remembering what the old man had said a few seconds before, wondered how his grandfather would greet the young minister.

Wallace, all unknowing of what had taken place, came towards Baxter with outstretched hand and greeted him warmly. Then he turned to Amos, and held out his hand as he spoke. “I’m glad to see you here, Mr. Lancaster,” he said.

Old Amos lifted his eyes to those of the young minister, and for a few seconds stood looking at him. At first both his grandson and Ned Stuttard wondered what he would do. Then they saw the light of resolution come into his eyes, and watched him as he snatched the young minister’s hand in his. “Come and see me soon, lad,” he almost shouted, “I’ve a lot to say to thee.” Then before Wallace had time to reply he left him.

Leaving the church Amos went straight to the motorcar which was standing at the door. “Art ’a coming with me, lad?” he said to Baxter as he got into the car.

“No,” replied the young man, “I am going to walk.”

“But you’ll be home to lunch?”

“Yes, I shall be home before one.”

“That’s right. Don’t be long,” and the car rolled away.

“Well, what did you think of him?” asked a visitor as they came into the road. A few yards behind him Ned Stuttard followed, with his hand resting on the arm of the young minister.

Baxter did not reply.

“It were a funny sermon, weren’t it?” ventured the inquirer, a man by the name of Dixon.

Still Baxter did not reply. He did not feel in the humor for discussing the sermon.

“And yet it was interesting,” went on Dixon. “For that matter, it was, in a way, striking, and yet I am told that hardly anyone ever goes to hear him. St. Peter’s people told me that in you church holding more than a thousand, not more’n fifty people would be found either morning or evening. For all

that I should say that as a preacher you chap would be above the average, shouldn't you?"

"He's given us something to think about this morning, at all events," was Baxter's reply, and that was all he said during the walk to Barons Court.

"Baxter," exclaimed old Amos at three o'clock that afternoon, "is Fletcher there?"

"Fletcher?" queried the young man.

"Ay. I'm going down to have a chat with Ned Stuttard, and I told Fletcher to bring the car around at three o'clock."

"Yes, he's here," replied Baxter. "Shall I go with you?"

"Nay, I want nobody. Perhaps I'll stay to tea with him. I don't know."

When old Amos returned to Barons Court that evening it was nearly seven o'clock. It was evident that the old man had been talking about things which had excited him greatly, for his eyes sparkled in spite of his age, and his hands trembled. But he said not a word to his grandson, and when soon after nine o'clock he went to bed, and said good night to Baxter, he asked him whether he thought Stephen Wallace had heard him say that morning that his sermon was rubbish.

"He might have done," replied the young man, catching the humor of the situation. "What would you say to him when he comes here to see us, if you find out that someone has told him?"

But old Amos did not reply, although there was a curious look in his eyes.



# 11. Ruth Townley

BAXTER WAS SOMEWHAT LATE at his office on the following morning. Ordinarily he was there something before eight o'clock and, having gone through the letters, returned to Barons Court for breakfast. This morning, however, the forenoon was far advanced before he entered what was called the main counting house, where he found a number of typists and clerks at work.

After having spent a few minutes there, he went on to his own private office some little distance away. He had not been there long before a knock came to the door. "Yes," he said, responding to the knock. "Who is it?"

For answer a man about forty-five years of age came into the room carrying a bundle of letters.

"Ah! Nehemiah," said Baxter. "I was just on the point of ringing for you. Have you got anything of importance there?"

"Nay, not much, Mr. Baxter," replied the man. "As you know, the post is generally very light of a Monday morning. Saturday is almost a holiday to most people. Still, I've gone through what letters there are."

"That's right! Have you answered them?"

"All except two or three," was the reply, "and those I've brought for you to see."

A few minutes later the batch of correspondence which Nehemiah Blackburn brought had been dealt with. Nevertheless, the man lingered in Baxter's office as if he had something more to say.

"What is it, Nehemiah?" asked the young man, looking at the other intently.

Let me interpolate an explanation here which, while perhaps unnecessary, may remove any possible doubt which may have arisen in some minds. Although to business houses in London, as well as in many other large industrial centers, it may seem strange that an employer should address his chief clerk or business manager by his Christian name, it is, however, quite a commonplace in provincial Lancashire towns. Even in

spite of trade unions, and such other societies, the spirit of camaraderie and homeliness which has long existed between employer and employee still remains.

“I’m bothered, Mr. Baxter,” said Nehemiah Blackburn. The man spoke perfect English, although with a strong Lancashire accent.

“I am sorry for that. What is it?” asked Baxter kindly.

“Nay, it’s not what you might think,” replied the other, “but seeing that your grandfather has put things into your hands, so to speak, I think I ought to tell you.”

“Yes?” and Baxter waited for the other to proceed.

But Nehemiah did not speak a word. He coughed awkwardly more than once as if on the point of speaking but nothing escaped his lips.

“Come, tell me now. What is it?” asked the young man.

“Well, maybe you will think I am interfering where I have no right to interfere, and as Edgar is a sort of cousin of yours—”

“What Edgar?” broke in Baxter.

“Edgar Butterworth,” Nehemiah replied. “As you know, your grandfather took him into the place a goodish while ago, and I expect, because you are in a way related, he has given him a certain amount of rope.”

Baxter looked at the other questioningly. He did not, as yet, understand what was in his mind. “I don’t quite see what you mean, Nehemiah,” he said. “What rope did grandfather give Edgar Butterworth?”

“For one thing he has never been taken to task for coming late of a morning,” was the reply, “and when months ago I asked your grandfather about it, he just laughed. You see, Edgar is related to you on your grandmother’s side.”

“Yes, but—”

“It’s not my business,” went on Nehemiah Blackburn almost eagerly, “and it may be you will have sympathy with Edgar Butterworth, although, as far as I know you, you have never been that kind of a lad; but I am bound to tell you that she’s given him notice to leave.”

“She’s given him notice to leave!” repeated Baxter. “Who’s given him notice to leave?”

“His secretary. She told him that she intended to leave this coming Saturday; but he laughed at her, and said that of course she didn’t mean it. Whereupon she came to me, and, I must say, she was terribly cut up.”

“I see,” said Baxter after thinking a few seconds quietly. “Yes, of course, Edgar has had a secretary since the South African department has been placed in his hands. I remember now; but as I have been away a great deal, and as I have only just taken control, I have not gone into the matter. Who is Edgar’s secretary and what is he called?”

“It is not he at all,” replied the other. “It is a young woman, and she complains of the way that Edgar is behaving. Of course, it’s scarcely my business, Mr. Baxter; for although I am responsible for the clerical staff, Edgar in no way takes his orders from me. All the same, she’s been at me twice now, and I thought I ought to take notice of it. I spoke to your grandfather about it a fortnight ago, but he as good as told me he couldn’t be bothered, and—”

“What’s Edgar’s secretary’s name?” Baxter interrupted him.

“Her name is Townley.”

“Is she on the premises now?”

“She was five minutes ago, anyhow. She was in Edgar’s private office. He hadn’t arrived then, and— well, I thought I’d tell you.”

Baxter thought a few seconds before speaking again. Then he said quietly: “Tell me exactly what this means, Nehemiah. You say that Edgar’s secretary wants to leave him because of his behavior. What do you mean by that?”

“Well, you know what Edgar is,” protested Nehemiah. “From what I can find out, he tried to kiss her, and that sort of thing, and when she protested and kept him at a distance, he threatened her.”

“Threatened her! I don’t understand.”

“Well, you see,” and Nehemiah spoke like one uncomfortable, “Edgar expects to be made a partner one day. In any case, he looks upon himself as being closely identified with the firm, and, from what I can gather, he told this young lady that he had it in his power to get her salary increased, or make her lose her job. So he kind of preys upon her fears, or tries to.”

Baxter looked serious. He was angry that Edgar Butterworth should have taken advantage of his grandfather’s kindness to him, and act in such a way. Of course, he must be careful. Old Amos Lancaster’s business was, as we have said, one of the largest and most important in Lancashire, and a large number of clerks and typists were employed; thus it would not do to take notice of all the tales that one might hear.

“Nehemiah,” and Baxter spoke sharply, “send for this Miss— What did you say she was called?”

“Ruth Townley.”

“Send for this Ruth Townley at once, and I want you to remain with us during our interview.”

A minute or two later Nehemiah Blackburn again returned to Baxter Lancaster’s office accompanied by a girl whom Baxter had not seen before.

“Won’t you sit down, Miss Townley?” he said, looking at her steadily; and then suddenly his attention became rapt. She was as different from the ordinary clerical help that one met with in a great Lancashire house of business as night is different from day. Tall, lady-like, cultured, refined; she seemed to belong to something entirely different from a great industrial house.

“I hear that you wish to leave our firm, Miss Townley?” he began.

“Yes, I do.”

“Why? Are you not satisfied?”

“No,” replied the girl.

“Why are you not satisfied?”

The girl thought a few seconds before replying. Then she said quietly: “I am not the kind of secretary that Mr. Butterworth requires.”

“Why not?” queried Baxter.

“I do not think I had better say any more,” she replied.

“Have you another situation in view?”

“Not at present.”

“Trade is bad in Lancashire,” he went on, “and I am afraid that if you leave here you will find it difficult to get another post. Have you anyone dependent on you?”

“I live alone with my mother, and her health is not good.”

“Then she is dependent upon you for support?”

The girl did not reply.

“I want to understand the truth about the case,” he persisted. “Would you mind telling me exactly how matters stand?”

“I don’t think I’d better.”

“From what Mr. Blackburn told me just now—”

“If Mr. Blackburn has told you something of why I cannot stay any longer, there is nothing more to say,” replied the girl.

Baxter was silent for some seconds. Nevertheless, he looked at the girl keenly. Yes, she was altogether different from the ordinary Lancashire typist. She spoke without a suggestion of Lancashire dialect, and, in a way, seemed out of place in a great Lancashire house of business. He saw, too, that the girl was suffering. Her quivering nostrils and her trembling lips told of the pain that she bore in consequence of being brought before the head of the firm in this way.

“Do you make any charge against Mr. Butterworth?” he asked at length, “and am I to take your statement that you wish to leave as final?”

“In a way I do not wish to leave the firm,” she replied. “It will place me in a very awkward position. I have to earn not only my own living, but that of my mother; and, as I said just now, such work as I can do is not easy to find in Lancashire. I can only do secretarial work.”

“How long have you lived in Lancashire?”

“My mother and I came here about a year ago.”

“Where did you live before then?”

“In one of the south-eastern counties,” was the reply.

“Then you have no idea what you will do when you leave here?”

“Not at present.”

“Excuse me for seeming inquisitorial, but have you any private means?”

“None at all.” She seemed on the point of saying more, but refrained.

“Then—then—”

“There are things worse than starvation,” she broke in, “and my mother understands the whole situation.”

Pride showed itself in every tone of her voice. It was suggested by every movement of her body; by her long, tapering fingers; by her finely chiseled features. Poor, working girl though she might be, she was as much a lady, in the true sense of the word, as Peggy Edgecumbe or Evelyn Templeton.

Baxter rang the bell a little impatiently. “Is Mr. Edgar Butterworth in his office, John?” he asked of the clerk who answered the bell.

“He has just come, Mr. Baxter.”

“Tell him to come here at once; I want to see him,” he said a little peremptorily.

A minute later a typical middle-class Lancashire youth entered the room. He was by no means bad looking, and, as he could boast of an excellent tailor, he presented quite an attractive appearance. Nevertheless, a quick and close observer would not have been favorably impressed by him. The truth

was, young Edgar Butterworth wanted to be regarded as “a young blood.” His mother, who had for years lived on old Amos’s bounty, had managed to send him to one of our small public schools, and on leaving there Edgar hoped that she would be able to manage to send him to either Oxford or Cambridge, even although he had not the slightest inclination, or ability for that matter, for a scholastic life. This proved impossible, and on leaving school he, for more than two years, sponged upon his mother, and wasted his time generally. Then Mrs. Butterworth approached Amos, and asked him to do something for her boy, and at last persuaded the old man that it was his duty to do so. After a time old Amos, in a weak moment, put him in partial control of an unimportant branch of the business, and told him that his remuneration would largely depend upon what success he made in it.

Edgar Butterworth looked around the office with a somewhat supercilious stare as he entered. He might have been thinking that had he been in Baxter’s position he would have had the office differently furnished. A second later, however, he gave a start. His eye fell upon Ruth Townley, and the look on her face did not make him feel comfortable. Still, it was evident that he regarded his own position as assured.

“Butterworth,” and there was no suggestion in Baxter’s voice that he regarded Edgar as in any way related to him, “I am given to understand that Miss Townley has been acting in the capacity of secretary to you. That is so, isn’t it?”

“I suppose you might call it that,” replied Edgar.

“She has also announced her determination to leave, and has told Mr. Blackburn that she wishes to terminate her engagement with the firm on Saturday next.”

Edgar Butterworth smiled in his somewhat superior manner. He might have been on the point of saying that he could explain the matter all right.

“Is that so?” asked Baxter.

“In a way I suppose it is,” replied the other in a nonchalant manner.

“Will you tell me, in as few words as possible, why Miss Townley wishes to take this step?”

Edgar looked at the other closely as though he was much surprised. Up to now he had had practically no experience with Baxter. The young man whom he had called his cousin, although they were but distantly related, had spent a great deal of his time in traveling since he, Edgar, had joined the firm. As a consequence it had been because old Amos had, in response to

his mother's request, sought to do him a good turn, that he had been employed. He moreover imagined that he could do as he liked with old Amos, and he had an idea that Baxter, being a young man only a little older than himself, would easily forgive his peccadilloes.

"Look here, Baxter," said Edgar, with an air of assurance, "you don't wish me to explain the why and the wherefore here, do you? You and I are both men of the world, and if you will come and have a bit of lunch with me at the 'Crown and Anchor,' I will explain everything you want to know."

"Thank you," replied Baxter, "I cannot lunch with; you at the 'Crown and Anchor,' nor anywhere else, but I wish to know why this young lady wishes to resign her post."

Edgar looked from one to the other with an uneasy laugh. "Because she is a damn fool; that's why!"

"Please tell me what you mean by that?"

"Look here, Baxter, don't be a milk-sop! You are not a fool, if she is. You can see she is a pretty girl, and—well, I tried to kiss her, if you must know, and— and—well, she didn't know which side her bread was buttered. She doesn't seem to think that I can easily get another secretary who isn't such a fool as she is, and who is willing to be obliging. There now! I don't think there is any need for me to say more now, is there? You quite understand," and he leered into Baxter's face with an uneasy laugh.

"Is that all?" and Baxter's voice was hard and metallic.

"Oh, come off the roof!" Edgar almost shouted. "You are not such a saint as all that, so you needn't pretend to be indignant!"

Baxter made no reply, save to look at Ruth Townley as if wondering what she thought of Edgar's retort. "Miss Townley," he said, "there is no need for you to stay any longer, neither will you be expected to work with Mr. Butterworth any longer. Mr. Blackburn will find something for you to do until I have time to deal further with the arrangement of the staff."

"Then you do not wish me to leave, Mr. Lancaster?"

"Certainly not. It is not I who suggested your leaving; that was your own affair; but I do not wish you to work here under circumstances which are not pleasant to you." He smiled as he spoke, and then, yielding to a sudden impulse, he went to the door and opened it.

"What do you mean, Baxter?" asked Edgar with an oath.

"I mean that I am rather ashamed of this episode."

“Ashamed! Don’t talk such rot! What would you have done if you had been in my place? Perhaps I was silly, but, as you see, she is a jolly fine girl, and, as I say, perhaps I made a fool of myself. But wouldn’t you have done the same?”

“I hope I should have acted like a gentleman,” was Baxter’s reply.

“Tommy rot!” shouted the other with a jeering laugh. “Besides, if you think you can choke me off that way— Oh, yes, I know what you are thinking. She is as poor as a church mouse, for all her fine ways, and I don’t give up easily. But look here, who am I to have as secretary?”

“I have not decided yet whether you will continue to need a secretary,” replied Baxter quietly.

“Why, in Heaven’s name! Mine will be an important department some day, and, and— Look here, Baxter, what do you take me for? I am not a clerk, and, after all, blood is thicker than water, otherwise old Amos wouldn’t have given me the job!”

“Who wouldn’t have given you the job?”

“Old Amos,” shouted Edgar truculently. “You know who I mean well enough. Evidently he was very angry. He resented being snubbed before his late secretary and Mr. Nehemiah Blackburn, and was now anxious to assert himself.

“I think you should refer to your employer as Mr. Lancaster,” replied Baxter quietly.

“I am damned if I do!” shouted the other.

Baxter controlled his rising temper. At least, he would not yield to passing impulses, or answer his *soi-disant* relative in the spirit he had spoken. Still, he determined not to have a repetition of such things, and he spoke more peremptorily than he might otherwise have done.

A minute later a clerk answered his bell. “John,” he said, “will you go to Mr. Ridgway, and tell him I want to see him?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the clerk, who moved quickly away.

“What—I mean, what are you sending for Ridgway for?”

Baxter did not reply, but waited with seeming impatience for Mr. Ridgway to come.

“Have you looked into the workings of the South African department lately, Mr. Ridgway?” asked Baxter when this man entered the room.

“No, Mr. Baxter. Perhaps you will remember that it was a department created by Mr. Lancaster for Mr. Butterworth. It has scarcely fallen within



my province to overhaul it.”

“Mr. Butterworth,” commanded Baxter, “you will place all your books and correspondence at Mr. Ridgway’s disposal, and if you will be so kind, Mr. Ridgway, I shall be glad if you will look thoroughly into the workings of the department, and report to me as soon as possible.”

“Certainly, Mr. Baxter,” replied Mr. Ridgway quietly, although there was astonishment in his eyes. “Is there anything more?”

“That’s all for the present.”

“Thank you. Good morning.”

“What the—” Edgar stopped at this. Perhaps the look in Baxter’s eyes made him afraid to complete what he was going to say. “What am I to understand from this?” he concluded almost tamely.

“You are to understand that I have, for some time, had suspicions that the South African department has not been conducted as I should like. I am having it inquired into.”

“And if it doesn’t please your lordship?” asked Edgar with a sneer.

“I shall have to consider whether I shall let it remain under your control.”

“Oh, that’s your tactics, is it? Well, it won’t pay you, I can tell you that! Old Amos may have made a fine speech about you last week, but I remember what he told me, after all, and I shall complain to him of the way I have been treated. Mind that!”

“Good morning,” was Baxter’s reply, as he again rang the bell.

Edgar stamped out of the room in a towering rage, and having made his way to a public house which he patronized, he spoke sneeringly of old Amos Lancaster’s grandson, and boasted that he could have him in the soup at any moment. But when he found himself alone again, he began to think furiously. “I was a fool to bother about the girl at all,” he reflected, “but she was so beastly superior that I wanted to take her down a peg, and— and— I wonder what Baxter will do?”

Meanwhile old Amos Lancaster’s grandson sat alone in his office. He was wondering whether, if Ruth Townley had been an ordinary, commonplace girl, Edgar Butterworth’s behavior would have angered him so.

## 12. A Searching Question

[Had Baxter Lancaster] had been asked on Monday night whether anything particular had happened that day, especially since he had parted with Edgar Butterworth, he would have answered in the negative. And yet he felt that, in a way he could not understand, the day was laden with destiny.

Less than an hour after leaving the little restaurant where he usually had his lunch, he was passing down one of the streets of Baronstown when he saw Peggy Edgecumbe. She was standing, and was looking into the bookshop where they had met a day or two previously.

“It’s gone,” she exclaimed with a smile, after the ordinary greetings had taken place. “Did you buy it?”

“What’s gone?” he asked.

“The copy of that book we saw. ‘In Quest of Happiness.’”

“Yes, I bought it.”

“And what did you think of it? My uncle said that it was rubbish.”

“Most of it is,” replied Baxter. “It’s a miracle to me how such a book can be boomed into something like fame. It doesn’t suggest the way to find happiness at all.”

“Do you think it can be found?” asked the girl.

“I am afraid not,” was his reply. “Good afternoon, Miss Edgecumbe. It was kind of you to speak to me,” and he left her.

“Now what does that mean?” she asked herself, as she watched him go down the street. But she did not attempt to find an answer to her question. She only wondered at the look of hunger in Baxter’s eyes.

Two hours later he was coming out of the only teashop, of which the town boasted, when he heard his own name.

Ordinarily when he wanted tea, he had it brought to him in his own office, but today he felt nervous and disturbed, and wanted distraction. He did not think he would find it in the teashop, neither indeed did he. But

coming out and hearing his name, he looked around eagerly. A minute later his heart beat a little faster than it was wont.

“I expected you up to Templeton Court yesterday,” the voice continued, “Why didn’t you come?”

“How could I have known I was wanted?” he asked.

“Because—” Evelyn Templeton hesitated a second, and then went on: “Did you feel your ears burning?”

He shook his head. “Nary a burn,” he replied whimsically.

“Then there is no truth in the old belief,” she cried. “My father and I were discussing you, and all sorts of nice things were said about you.”

“Why wasn’t I there to hear?” he asked with a laugh.

“Would you have come had you known?” and her eyes laughed into his.

“One seldom hears good spoken of oneself,” he evaded.

“Don’t talk rubbish,” responded the girl. “You know——” Evidently she meant to say more, but checked herself.

Baxter found himself walking by the girl’s side, and he almost wondered that he had not committed himself when he had visited Templeton Court.

For Evelyn Templeton looked very beautiful that day, more beautiful, he thought, than he had ever seen her before. She seemed determined to captivate him, too. Her eyes sparkled; her laugh was frequent, and: although she had said nothing to him which could be fastened upon as indicative of her pleasure at his walking by her side, Baxter could, had he been vain, have interpreted it in that way without any stretch of imagination.

“You will come up again soon, won’t you——” She hesitated a second, and then finished the sentence— “Baxter?” and the word sounded like a caress.

“Give me a chance,” he replied with a laugh.

“There is always a chance,” was her answer, and then she laughed as she got into her car, and was driven away.

“I suppose I must go up again soon,” he reflected as he made his way towards the great block of buildings which were designated in the town as “Lancaster’s.”

“Grandfather seems to wish that it should be so, while evidently——”

His reflections did not carry him any further, neither indeed did they seem altogether pleasant. “What does it amount to, after all?” he asked himself presently. “Supposing I were to do what grandfather wishes, and ask her to marry me? Supposing, too, she accepted me, and, and— Oh,

hang it all! She isn't a woman, in spite of everything; she is only a beautiful statue who can put on the semblance of life for the sake of pleasing; but—but—"

He found his way into his private office, and signed the letters which he had dictated during the forenoon, and which his secretary had brought to him.

"Life hasn't much to offer after all," he went on reflecting, when he had finished. "Evelyn Templeton could never satisfy me. Of course she is beautiful, but she isn't a girl any longer; she's just a handsome, stately woman. In a few years—"

He paused in his reflections here, and then went on: "After all, it would be maddening to feel that your wife was growing old, and withered."

Again he hesitated, and presently he burst into a hard, bitter laugh.

*"The love of a lifetime! The love of a lump of clay! For that is all you can offer me!"*

He found himself repeating Peggy Edgecumbe's words, and he remembered the bitter way in which she had spoken them.

"She seemed to be angry," was the thought that haunted him. "She seemed to think that—that— Oh, hang it all! What's the good of bothering? She's turned me down once and for all!"

A little later the buzzers from a hundred mills declared the fact that it was now half-past five, the time when the operatives ceased work; while louder than all the rest was the great buzzers at Lancaster's. Then, almost as if by magic, engines stopped, looms ceased working, and silence prevailed where a few minutes before there had been the roar and the rush of machinery.

He went to the window, and looked out, and saw a crowd of operatives, mainly, as it seemed to him, girls, emerging from the mills. He saw, too, the shapeless footwear which they had on—usually designated clogs—and heard them rattle against the paving stones as their wearers made their way along the streets. In the main, the girls seemed in a good temper, and were eagerly making their way towards their homes. Their day's work was done, and now they would spend the evening as they felt disposed.

Baxter closed his office desk with a snap. He might have been thinking unpleasant thoughts; thoughts which made him impatient, angry. Then, seizing his hat, he left the room, and made his way into the street.

Why did he do that? He had not meant to! For that matter, he had scarcely given Ruth Townley a thought since she had left his office that morning. He had been rather bothered about Edgar Butterworth, but concerning the girl who had occasioned the trouble he had practically thought nothing. And yet here he was lifting his hat to her!

Well, why not? What was wrong in recognizing a fine looking girl. And she was fine looking, too. He hoped that Nehemiah Blackburn had found her congenial work to do. He must look into the matter on the morrow, and see everything was settled satisfactorily.

He turned on his heel in the street, and watched her as she was passing out of his sight. Yes, she was a fine girl; beautiful, in fact. She was refined and graceful, too. He was glad that Nehemiah Blackburn had brought her complaint before his notice. He would see to it that Edgar Butterworth never had another chance of insulting her.

Then all such thoughts were driven suddenly from his mind. "Is that you, Baxter? You don't mind my calling you Baxter, do you?"

Turning he saw Stephen Wallace. "My dear chap, I thought it was agreed between us that we should call each other by our Christian names. What are you doing tonight?"

"I shall be engaged until half-past eight; after that I shall be as free as air," laughed the young minister.

"Won't you come up for a chat?" and Baxter looked eagerly into the other's face.

"You are sure I shan't be in the way? You won't have any visitors, will you?"

"The house will be empty but for grandfather and me, and I will be as glad as a bird if you will come."

"You are sure?"

"Of course I am sure."

"Then I'll come."

True to his promise, the young minister arrived at Barons Court shortly after half-past eight, and he saw at a glance that Baxter looked rather gloomy and depressed.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Why should anything be the matter?"

"There isn't the slightest reason why there should," replied Wallace. "It's been a glorious day, and since the mills have ceased working there is hardly

a cloud to be seen, especially up here, a few hundred feet above the town.”

“Well, you look jolly, anyhow,” retorted Baxter.

“Why shouldn’t I be? I am well and strong—”

“And haven’t a care,” suggested the other.

“Oh, if you come to that, we all of us have cares. Every life has its disappointments; it is doubtless right that they should. Why, the very spice of life would be gone if everything went pleasantly and we had all that we desired.”

“But if you have nothing that you desire?” urged Baxter. “What then?”

Wallace laughed heartily. “Fancy you talking about having nothing you desire!” he said. “You live in the most beautiful old house for miles around. You have servants to do your every bidding. You have only to name your desire, and you get it.”

“Is that how you think of me?”

“How can I help it?” replied the young minister.

“Great heavens!” ejaculated Baxter.

“What’s that pious aspiration for?” the other demanded.

“Look here, Wallace,” and the young manufacturer took a box of cigars from a table close by and, opening it, passed it to the young minister. “You think I have everything to make me happy, don’t you?”

“Well, haven’t you?”

They were sitting in Baxter’s private sanctum which the young man had, two or three years before, ordered to be furnished according to his own tastes. A rich, heavy carpet lay on the floor, while scattered around the room were four large comfortable, leather-covered arm-chairs. The walls were covered with dark brown oak paneling, while on two sides of the room were well-filled book-cases. On every hand were signs of taste, and wealth, and culture.

“Wallace, have you seen old Ned Stuttard today?”

“Yes. I was in his house less than two hours ago.”

“How is he?”

“I don’t think I want to tell you.”

“Don’t want to tell me! Why?” asked Baxter in tones of wonder.

“Because I don’t think you are in the humor to hear.”

Baxter looked at the other for several seconds without speaking. Then he sighed. “Perhaps you are right,” he said.

A long silence ensued, during which the young manufacturer seemed to be thinking deeply. "I am awfully glad you could come up tonight, Stephen," he said at length.

"Yes. Why?"

"I wanted to ask you about yesterday morning."

"Yes. What about yesterday morning?"

"Did you mean it? Did you really believe what you said?"

"Certainly. Why?"

Baxter looked at Stephen Wallace a long time without replying. "Of course, what you said was, in a way, very interesting." His words came out slowly, and with seeming difficulty. "Let me see, Wallace," he went on, "you graduated at Edinburgh, didn't you?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You have taken a Divinity degree since, haven't you?"

"I am a Bachelor of Divinity, if that is what you mean."

"Yes, I mean that. Of course, I never took a Divinity degree, but I did very well at Oxford, and—and I was regarded as one of the reading men. You won't be offended if I ask you a plain question, will you?"

"I? Not a bit of it I Ask what you like."

"I am not asking it lightly. Last night, after I saw grandfather to his room, I stayed up for hours thinking, and thinking, and thinking. I suppose Eliza Stuttard's funeral was at the back of it all, but—" He stopped again, and became silent.

"Yes, old man, what is it?" urged Wallace presently.

"Are you sure that the story of Christ is anything more than a myth?" he asked presently.—" Don't mistake me, I don't think of Jesus as a myth; I suppose that his existence is pretty well attested to. Most thinkers and scholars seem to agree, even in these days, that there was a man called Jesus who lived nearly two thousand years ago in Palestine. In all probability, too, he was a very remarkable young man; and just as many another man of advanced views has done, he suffered death because of the thoughts and hopes which he cherished— But the other—the Christ myth—that is altogether different. There has grown up around the name of Jesus, the Christ myth which declares that He rose from the dead; that He appeared to His disciples; that He promised them all sorts of impossible things; that He ascended into Heaven; that the Spirit of God came upon His disciples, and bestowed upon them the gift of power. Do you really believe

all that? Do you really believe that Jesus triumphed over death, and that He brought immortality to life?" Then, raising his voice, he looked at Stephen Wallace straight in the face. "Do you believe in all you said yesterday morning?"

"Don't you?" asked Wallace.

"No, I don't. My God, don't I wish I could! But I don't; I can't! Now look here, Wallace, I don't want you to answer me unless you wish to, unless you really wish to. I realize that it is not a question about which you can talk lightly. You and I are both young fellows who have to face life as it is. You, by some chance, are a parson; I am not. Indeed, I am not of your way of thinking. All the same, we are brought up against the great facts of life, and we have to meet them. And I am all at sea, old man; all at sea! You were assuming yesterday in your address that Jesus was all the Church claims for him. But supposing that isn't true! How can you prove—prove, mark you—to the satisfaction of any honest-thinking man that Christ is what He is said to be? Because I don't believe He is what He is said to be! I don't know how it came to be believed in in the first place; it is not my affair, but, as far as I am concerned, Jesus was no more than any other man of His times. A good man, no doubt; a man ahead of His age perhaps, but only that and nothing more! But you claim more for Him! You claim for Him what He is said to have claimed for Himself!"

"What?" asked Wallace.

"Life! Eternal Life!" replied the other. "You claim that He said: 'I am come that they might have Life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' That, in short, He came as the Giver of Life; Life eternal!"

"And don't you believe that?"

"I would to God I could! But I must be honest, and I ask you, whose job it is to talk about such things, to tell me why I should think of Christ as any other than a myth. I ask you, too, to speak frankly, as one man to another."

"I will speak frankly," replied Wallace. "I don't say I can convince you of what I know to be the truth, because no man was ever yet convinced by argument; but, for a moment, admit that Christ was a myth."

"Do you admit it?" asked Baxter quickly.

"I say this," replied the young minister. "If Christ were a myth, you are led into the greatest series of contradictions that the world has ever known."

"In what way?" asked the other eagerly.



“In this way. If Christ were a myth, then Christianity is a lie, a fabrication, a something foisted upon a credulous humanity.”

Baxter nodded his head as if in confirmation.

“If Christ were a myth,” went on Wallace; “if the Christian story is founded upon a lie, then you have a lie becoming the greatest civilizing force that the world has known for the last two thousand years! If Christ were a myth, then you have a lie acting in opposition to its own essence; you have a lie giving us love for hatred, purity for lust, fineness for filth, hope for despair, optimism for cynicism, brotherhood for a poor, miserable misanthropy! If Christ were a myth, you have a lie producing that which is exactly in opposition to itself. You have a lie, which in its very essence is degrading and damning, producing the best literature, the highest art, I the divinest music! Even your most skeptical cynics agree that Christianity has produced the highest and noblest things in the world. Which means, when you get ’ to the very foundation of the thought, that you have a lie which is producing truth; that a thing which is unholy in essence is producing holiness; that you have, in short, right down through the ages, for nearly two thousand years, a thing, which in its very essence is wrong, working in the minds and hearts of untold millions, and which is uplifting, which is purifying, and which is glorifying!”

Baxter was silent for more than a minute. “Yes,” he said presently, “I suppose if I admit the truth of what you say—”

“But, my dear chap,” burst in Wallace excitedly, “ask your own common sense if it isn’t so! Ask your reason! Ask your memory! Ask anything! Think! Could a lie produce nobility of character? Could a lie turn a sinner into a saint? Could a lie inspire men in all the ages to go into the dark places of the world, and make those places bright? Could a lie produce Francis of Assisi, or Catherine of Sienna, or John Wesley? Man alive! Can’t you see how such a statement contradicts all that is noblest and best?”

“I am awfully sorry, Wallace,” exclaimed Baxter, after another silence. “I suppose you think that what you have said is very convincing, but it doesn’t convince me in the least.”

“I didn’t think it would,” replied Wallace.

“You didn’t?”

“No. In fact, as I said just now, I doubt if ever any man was led to accept Christianity through argument. But you asked me for something which might satisfy the intelligence of an honest-thinking man, and I put that

forward as something which was worth thinking about; something which, in its essence, is true and convincing.”

“Then why am I not convinced?”

“For the same reason,” replied Wallace slowly, “that your grandfather no longer believes that your grandmother is alive! For the same reason that old Ned Stuttard had lost all hope that he would ever see his wife again!”

“I don’t understand you.”

“Did you ever read the letters of a man called Paul who lived immediately after Jesus?”

“You mean St. Paul’s Epistles?” asked Baxter.

“I don’t care what you call them,” replied the other. “In any case, Paul was a very wise man, and he got down to the truth of things.”

“I haven’t read him for years,” replied Baxter; “but I always thought of him as a pedant.”

“Whatever you thought of him,” replied the other, “he struck deep. Here is one saying of his which is hard to get away from:”But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

“Yes, and I am jolly natural,” admitted Baxter with a grim smile, “but —”

At that moment the door opened, and old Amos Lancaster came into the room. “Ay, Mr. Wallace,” exclaimed the old man as he went towards the young minister with outstretched hand, “I’m reight pleased to see you.”

“That’s very good of you,” replied Wallace.

“Nay, it’s nowt of the sort. I want to apologize.”

“Apologize for what?”

“For saying what I did yesterday. But who told you what had happened to me?”

“Who told me what had happened to you?”

“Ay, I never meant to have told anybody.”

“I don’t understand.”

“What you said in your sermon yesterday morning,” persisted the old man. “You said you knew of a man who had lost his wife, and who, at the time of losing her, felt she was near him, and afterwards, when he had forgot her God, and worshipped the god of ’ get on,’ his feelings left him. I never told anybody about it!”

“I wasn’t thinking of you at all,” replied Wallace. “I was remembering the story of another man.”

“And I thought you meant me!” exclaimed old Amos. “Well, it is true, anyhow. Ay, lad, I wur vexed with you at the time; I wur for sure! But now I can thank you for what you said. I’ve been a fool, lad; I’ve been a fool!”

“Come now, grandfather,” protested Baxter. “Mr. Wallace didn’t come here to hear you call yourself names!”

“Ay, lad, but it’s true.”

He had, almost ever since he had entered the room, been holding Wallace’s hand, but at this moment he dropped it suddenly. “Do you know what I was reading just before you came in?” he asked presently.

“I should be interested to know, Mr. Lancaster,” replied Wallace.

“It’s burned like fire into my brain,” asserted the old man eagerly. “Listen! ‘The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought within himself, saying: ‘What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?’ And he said: ‘This will I do. I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul: ‘Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease! Eat, drink and be merry!’”—But God said unto him: ‘Thou fool!’”

“That’s what I’ve been reading, Mr. Wallace, and that’s what God has been saying to me I I’ve been worshiping a god of gold, while my soul has been dying! I wur terribly vexed yesterday when you wur talking about it, for I thought you were talking about me, like. And, in a way, you were, too. I used to be a Methodist, and loved th’owd chapel; but when I got to worship 3. god of gold, I forgot about the God that my old woman and I used to worship in Wesley Chapel. That was why when she was took from me I lost the feeling that she was living, and that I might meet her again. In fact, I lost everything. You said that my soul had become atrophied, and it’s true, master, it’s true! My soul is atrophied—dead!”

The old man was silent for more than a minute after this. Then he went on: “I went to see Ned Stuttard yesterday afternoon.”

Stephen Wallace nodded his head.

“Ned has been living on the same lines as I have, and— Mr. Wallace, I’m noan Congregational. Years agone I was a member of th’owd body; perhaps I am still, for all I know. My wife and I belonged to the superintendent minister’s class fifty years agone. I expect they have crossed

my name off the class book now; I don't know. I have never been, anyhow. As for Wesley Chapel, I haven't been there for a matter of ten years—not but what I pay my pew rent,” he said emphatically. “I never miss that, so I still call myself a member of th'owd body, if I am anything; but, as a matter of fact, I am nothing. You won't think I am intruding, will you?”

“Intruding I Of course not!”replied Wallace.

“Ay, weel, perhaps it would be no wonder if you did, but I don't feel like going to the Wesley superintendent seeing that I ne'er go to chapel. Besides, perhaps— Look here, Mr. Wallace, will you come and have a chat with me when Baxter isn't here?”

“Certainly, if you wish it.”

“Can you come tomorrow afternoon, say at three o'clock?”

“If you like.”

“Then I'll be waiting for you. Good night, my lad,” and old Amos left the room, while Stephen Wallace and Baxter looked upon each other in wonderment.

## 13. The Test Of Friendship

THE TWO YOUNG MEN each pulled at their cigars. Both were thinking deeply, but they were not thinking of the same things.

“I am glad I happened to see you in the town this afternoon,” said Wallace presently. “I want your help badly.”

“My help!” exclaimed Baxter. “My dear chap, what can my help be to you?”

“I want it, anyhow; and I want it badly.”

Baxter looked at the other curiously. He wondered what his newly-found friend needed his help for. An hour before he had declared that Stephen Wallace did not appear to have a care in the world; now he saw that he had been mistaken.

“I want to speak to you about two things,” went on Wallace presently. “I know it may seem strange that I should, seeing that I have only really known you for a few days. But let that go. I can speak to you freely, can’t I?”

“Why, of course!” exclaimed Baxter. There was astonishment in his voice, and he looked at the other keenly. “Is it about money?” he asked. “Are you hard up, or anything like that?”

Wallace burst out laughing. “No, my dear chap! I don’t regard you in the light of a moneylender, or anything of that sort! As far as that goes, I have more than I need. I don’t get a bad salary, and, well—my people are not badly off, and I have a comfortable income. No, it isn’t that at all.”

He lapsed into silence at this, while the other continued to look at him with increased astonishment. “What is it, then?” he asked.

“A week ago I should never have thought of going to you for advice,” said Wallace, “but—there, never mind I It is said that sometimes outsiders see most of the game. Thus, although you are altogether out of sympathy with my line of life, you may be able to give me valuable advice.

I came to Baronstown something like a year ago,” he went on.

“Yes?” queried Baxter.

“I am wondering if I ought to stay here.”

Baxter looked at him keenly and steadily. “There is something more you have to tell me,” he said. “What is it?”

For answer the young minister rose to his feet, and looked at his watch. “I’ve been here more than two hours,” he ejaculated; “and why should I bother you with my paltry affairs!”

“Because you’ve got to, Stephen,” said Baxter quietly. “I think I know something of what you are thinking. You made up your mind to ask me something, and then, because you are afraid it will bother me, you want to back out. But that won’t do. You and I are friends, or, at least, I hope we are. Now what is it, old man?”

Again silence fell between them for a few seconds. Then Wallace burst out like a man in anger: “You are right,” he said. “If a man can’t trust his friend, what is the use of friendship? I told you I had two things to ask you about, didn’t I? Well, I am going to tackle the easiest thing first, as far as you and I are concerned. Some time ago I had a letter from a rich and influential Congregational Church, asking me to become its minister. I wrote acknowledging it, and said I would give it my careful consideration. Let me be absolutely frank with you, or else you won’t be able to help me. I suppose that I, like other young ministers, am ambitious. Naturally, I want to occupy an honorable position in the denomination to which I belong. Well, while St. George’s Independent Chapel in Baronstown is in a way all right, it can never become great or important. You see, Baronstown is only a provincial Lancashire center, and can offer no such opportunities as, say, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, or London. Anyhow, I was influenced by the invitation I had received, and considered it very favorably. Then something happened. For one thing, I met you. For another, Eliza Stuttard died, and besides all that, there was something else, but I will not discuss that now. Anyhow, after a great deal of thought, I wrote the church secretary who had communicated with me, and told him that, after all things were considered, I thought it might be best for me to stay on here.”

Stephen Wallace gave his friend a piercing look. Then he said, slowly: “I suppose there was something tentative in the way I wrote. Anyhow, two men from this church, one the senior deacon, and the other the secretary, came to St. George’s yesterday.”

“Yesterday?”

“Yes, yesterday. I had not the slightest idea that they were there. As you know, the church was very crowded, especially in the morning, and it was easy to miss them. Of course, it was a curious day, as far as the services were concerned, for them to make up their minds as to the kind of man I was. Still, they evidently didn’t think so, and this morning they came to see me. They stayed the weekend at the Thistle Hotel, and left Baronstown shortly after two o’clock this afternoon.”

“Well?” queried Baxter, when he saw that the other had lapsed into silence.

“I hardly know how to express myself, old chap,” cried Wallace. “The fact of the matter is that both these men expressed themselves as being tremendously impressed with the services, and urged me very strongly to reconsider my decision. I told them, of course, that yesterday was altogether an unfair day to judge by; that, as a rule, we had a congregation of far less than a hundred people, and that usually the services were cold, barren, and ineffective. But they seemed to take no notice of that, and continued to insist that I was the man they needed.”

“And what are you going to do about it?” asked Baxter.

“Well, first of all I didn’t confirm the letter I wrote a few days ago, and, as a consequence, the invitation stands open for further consideration. For another thing, I am strongly tempted to accept this invitation. I have preached more than once at the church, although at the time of doing so I never thought that they were thinking of me as a possible minister. It is a fine church; large congregations came to hear me, and— Well, it is no exaggeration to say that it is one of the plums of the denomination. I hate talking like this, but you may as well know the truth.”

“Then what’s your difficulty, my dear fellow?”

“This,” replied Wallace, starting to his feet. “Baronstown has nearly broken my heart. As you know, St. George’s Independent Chapel is regarded as the center of worldliness. It was started a good many years ago by a few rich men who broke away from Salem Chapel down in the town, because they said that the district around Salem was altogether unpleasant. Having plenty of money, they built a beautiful church; installed the best organ in the town; paid for the best organist obtainable, and invited the best preacher they could get.”

Baxter Lancaster laughed. He had, more than once, heard the history of St. George’s Independent Chapel.

“As your grandfather told me,” went on Wallace, “on the night of the fête, St. George’s has broken the hearts of several ministers, and he hoped it wouldn’t break mine. When I came here I was hopeful that I should be able to bring something like life into the valley of dry bones; but I couldn’t. The smug respectability of the place seemed as though it would crush all the life out of me. Both its congregation and its membership are made up of just a few old Independents who have a scorn for anything like earnestness. You have heard of the old Bishop, haven’t you, who was giving advice to a young, fervent vicar who was going into a new parish? ‘Preach the Gospel,’ he said, ‘and keep down enthusiasm.’ I rather think that is the attitude at St. George’s Church. Anyhow, I have been able to do nothing there. We simply stink with money. There’s nothing I desire, which money can buy, which I can’t have. But the spirit of worldliness holds the place. You understand, don’t you? Well, as I told you, I had it in my heart before I came to rouse the people, to make them realize what a church meant, or what it ought to mean; but I have been altogether unsuccessful. Young people, as a whole, avoid the place as they might avoid a pestilence. Everything is dead, dead, dead! You have no idea how I have been bothered; and I tell you frankly, if I hadn’t been certain about my calling, and about Jesus Christ, I should have chucked the whole thing months ago.”

Baxter looked at his friend with a new interest. The story he had told him made a strong appeal to him. He had scarcely ever thought of the inwardness of Wallace’s profession, but the young minister had brought it before him strongly and vividly. “Then what’s your difficulty, old man?” he asked presently.

“This,” replied Wallace. “Every selfish fiber of my being tells me to clear out of Baronstown, and go to the church of which I have been speaking. I have tried, and as the operatives here say sometimes ‘better tried,’ to get a new spirit into St. George’s. It has been all in vain. These rich old Independents don’t want to be shaken out of their sloth; they don’t want the church to become a living church; they don’t want to attract the crowds of young men and women who surge our streets, and make them think of higher and better things. And yet I feel, on the other hand, that if I were to accept this fine church I should be running away from my real job. For, mark you, hard as it would be to work at the old Salem Chapel which is situated in the midst of a slum property, it is a hundred times harder to work at St. George’s. But more than that. Some little time ago I read a novel



about a man who went to a town which was dying to spirituality just as Baronstown is, and this man, because he was sure of the Gospel he preached, and because it was a tremendous reality to him, roused the whole town to life. And I said to myself, ' If that is true of his case, it shall be true as far as Baronstown is concerned, because I am sure of the Gospel I preach; sure of Jesus Christ.'”

“But it hasn’t come off, eh?” asked Baxter.

“Come off! I have been one of the most putrid failures that ever entered a church. No man is more convinced of the truth of the Gospel than I am, and yet no man is more impotent. And I feel this, that while I shall never be a success at Baronstown, I can, under the better circumstances of the other church, become a power for good. What would you advise me to do, old man?”

Baxter did not reply for more than a minute. He felt the force of the case which Wallace had put; realized that, humanly speaking, such work that Wallace could do would be wasted at St. George’s. The church had been known for years in the town, not as a center of spirituality, but a center of worldliness. It was even a byword among the people that at St. George’s you could get anything but religion.

That on the one hand. But there was another. Was not St. George’s something like a challenge to a (man of Wallace’s caliber? And would it not be cowardly to run away?" You have not told me all yet, Wallace," he said. “Let’s hear the rest.”

“How did you know there was any more?”

“Felt it in my bones,” and Baxter laughed as he spoke.

“Well, to tell the truth, then,” and a bright light came into Wallace’s eyes as the words passed his lips. “As I said yesterday morning, Mrs. Stuttard asked me to come and see her before she died.”

“Yes, I remember your saying as much,” assented Baxter.

“She was one of the few Christians, real Christians, who belonged to St. George’s,” went on the young minister. “She was one of the few ’ saints in Caesar’s household.’ Well, she appealed to me not to leave St. George’s.”

“Why?”

The young minister lapsed into silence again, which lasted for more than a minute. Then he continued his story, speaking slowly and in low tones, as if he were afraid.

“I told her,” he said, “that I had been a failure in the town, a failure from every point of view; that I had failed to rouse the old members; that I had failed to draw the crowds of young men and women who were to be found everywhere.”

“And she! What did she say to you?”

“She urged that if I were sure of the Gospel story— and she emphasized the ‘sure’—that it was my business to go on telling it, no matter what might be the apparent result. I told her that God had no use for unsuccessful men. Whereupon she urged upon me that that was all nonsense; that sometimes the unsuccessful men did the most good. She said that God’s ideas of success and ours were entirely different. Our idea of a successful minister was a man who attracted quantity, whereas God’s idea was not only the man who attracted quantity, but the man who was splendid in apparent failure. She said this too—’ Something is going to happen to my Ned soon, and I want you to stay for his sake.’”

“She said that, did she?” queried Baxter eagerly.

“Those were, as near as I can remember, her very words. Of course, they may be merely the expression of an hysterical woman who was close to a fatal illness; but they made me think. I really believe that but for them I should have told the two men who came to see me today that I would accept their invitation— No,” he added, “it was not that alone, it was something else which stopped me from telling them.”

“What was it?”

But Wallace gave no answer. He had again become excited, and was walking around the room.

“Do you realize,” he said at length, “that a week ago we didn’t know each other. Before your birthday I was, as you told me, nothing more than a name to you; while you, as far as I was concerned, were only a very rich young fellow who would not give a second thought to such as I!”

Baxter laughed. “It does seem strange, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it does. Perhaps it seems stranger still that you should, on the spur of the moment, have invited me in here, and, in a way, made a confidant of me.”

Baxter was silent.

“I only half opened my heart to you,” went on Wallace at length. “I did not tell you about this invitation, or about what Mrs. Stuttard said to me. I

felt I had no right, and, more than that, it would seem like sacrilege, wouldn't it?"

"In a way I suppose it would."

"But what must I do?" went on Stephen Wallace at length. "I have told you frankly about the position here, and my doubts as to whether I ought to stay. What do you think?"

"You haven't told me all yet," Baxter exclaimed. "You admitted as much just now. Tell me the rest."

A strange look came into the young minister's eyes, and he seemed like one in doubt. "No, I mustn't tell you. It wouldn't be fair."

"Not fair! To whom wouldn't it be fair?"

"To neither of us."

"But I have nothing to do with it!",

"Yes, you have. Great heavens! you have."

Baxter looked at his guest wonderingly. "You are speaking in riddles, old man," he said.

"Nay, I am not. Surely you must understand. When you asked me to come in here on the night of the fete, you made a confession to me. I had no right to hear it, but I suppose we were both excited, and perhaps we both said more than we meant to say. Anyhow, you confessed that you had asked Peggy Edgecumbe to marry you, and that she had refused you. Then you asked me if I had proposed to her, and I was obliged to confess—"

"I am so sorry, old chap," broke in Baxter. "I had no business to press my question."

"Yes, you had," persisted Wallace, "and what I am going to say just now will test whether there is any reality in the friendship which has sprung up between us. I told you just now that there were two things I wanted to ask you about, and that I was going to tackle the easiest thing first, as far as you and I were concerned. But, really, the two things were linked so closely that they only made one. I have told you about this important invitation I have had, and the reasons for, and against, accepting it."

"Yes, go on," for Wallace had stopped in the middle of his story.

"It's not easy to go on, old man. Look here, have you spoken again to Peggy Edgecumbe since the night of the fete?"

"I've tried to," replied Baxter, "but she refused to listen to me."

The young minister heaved a sigh; it might have been a sigh of relief. "I have spoken to her again also," he said. "I went to her immediately on

leaving those two men who had come all the way from — to see me. I told her about the invitation and—everything.”

“And she! What did she say?” asked Baxter quickly. Then he added: “Did you ask her again?”

“I didn’t mean to, but I did. Somehow the words came to me before I was aware, and I was obliged to speak them. Look here, old chap,” and the young minister rose to his feet, and began to walk excitedly around the room again, “we are both in love with the same girl. On the day of your birthday we both asked her to marry us, and she refused us. What will you say if she chooses me rather than you? Is our friendship strong enough to stand the strain?”

“Did she accept you?” asked Baxter quickly.

“She didn’t meet me with a *non possumus*,” was the reply. “When I asked her on the day of the fête she was very positive in her answer, but this morning—”

“Yes, this morning?” repeated Baxter eagerly. “What did she say this morning? I am asking this because I gathered from what you told me before that she refused you, first because she didn’t love you well enough, and second because, being an agnostic, she felt she was unfitted to be a minister’s wife.”

“Yes, yes, I know?” broke in Wallace, “and, and— Oh! I do feel a cad in telling you what she said to me! It seems like betraying a confidence. In a way it’s sacrilege to repeat, even to your best friend, what the girl you love said to you. But to be frank, old man, I believe she cares for me more than I thought. Anyhow, she seemed to be mighty interested in the invitation that has been given me, and told me plainly, at least, that is how I interpreted her words, that she could never think of me in the way I desired while I remained in Baronstown.”

“And did she promise that she would marry you if you became the minister of this other church?”

“Perhaps I should be going too far if I said that,” replied Wallace, “but she certainly told me that she could never become the wife of the minister of St. George’s Chapel, Baronstown.”

“While she would do so if you accepted the invitation from the other place?” queried Baxter.

Wallace nodded. “That is as I interpreted her words,” he replied. “Now you can see why it was so hard for me to ask you, and why I am afraid to

know, even now, your advice. All the same, I am in a quandary as to what I ought to do, and I am asking you, in all sincerity, what you think my answer should be.”

Baxter did not reply for a long time. He sat back in his chair like a man fighting a great battle. “Would my opinion weigh with you?” he asked at length.

“I believe it would decide the question, as far as I am concerned,” replied Wallace.

“And you believe that if you went to this new church you might go as the husband of Peggy Edgecumbe?” he went on.

“I have reason to believe that I should.”

“While if you stayed in Baronstown—”

“I know I shouldn’t have any chance at all.”

“It’s not for me to advise you,” Baxter at length replied. “After all, you know your own duty best. But I don’t believe that the question as to whether Peggy Edgecumbe would become your wife depends upon the choice you make. If I know her at all, she isn’t that sort of girl.”

“Of course, you may be right, but I don’t think you are. If she felt a week ago that, being an agnostic, she ought not to be a minister’s wife, she feels it still.”

“But there is more than that,” Baxter added. “If she cares for you at all, you would stand a far better chance of winning her by remaining in Baronstown.”

“You think that?” cried Wallace eagerly.

“I can’t help thinking it.”

“Then, then—look here, would you regard it as a betrayal of friendship if I did my best to get her?”

“Of course not,” replied the other. “As you may imagine, I should feel—But no! I will say no more about it, and—and you remember the old adage, Wallace: ‘Everyone for himself in love and war.’”

“I am still in doubt as to what I ought to do,” Wallace said after another long silence.

“What, in relation to Miss Edgecumbe?”

“No. Whether I ought to leave Baronstown.”

“I told you just now that I wouldn’t give you any advice,” was Baxter’s reply. “All the same, if you asked me the place where I think you would do most good, I should say it’s here.”

“What! In Baronstown! after my miserable failure?”

“I have yet to be convinced that you have failed. And although I ought to be the last one to speak about such matters, I cannot help thinking of what Mrs. Stuttard said before she died.”

Stephen Wallace sat for a long time looking into space after Baxter had said this. “Thank you, old man,” he ejaculated presently. “I’ve made up my mind.”

“What are you going to do?”

Wallace left the house a minute later without making any reply, while Baxter watched him as he went towards the park gates. “Whether there is anything in Christianity or not,” reflected the young Lancashireman, “it must be a great reality to him. Otherwise—”

He did not finish the sentence even in his own mind, but went back to the house again, and sat for a long time in silence.

## 14. Baxter And Ruth Townley

SOME WEEKS HAD ELAPSED since Baxter's conversation with Stephen Wallace. He had not said anything to anyone concerning that conversation. Nevertheless, it doubtless affected him. More than once he had been on the point of speaking to his grandfather about it, but the old man had for some reason or another become very quiet and taciturn.

One morning, Baxter sat in his office alone. He had read and dictated answers to that part of the correspondence which appertained to him, and now sat listening while his secretary in the adjoining office typed the replies.

Presently he touched the bell which lay on the desk before him. "Will you ask Mr. Blackburn to come here?" he said to the youth who answered the bell, and a few minutes later the man in question entered the room.

"I have not heard anything further about the young woman we discussed some time ago, Nehemiah."

"No, Mr. Baxter. I didn't think there was any need to bother you. You told me to find a place for her, and I thought that was sufficient."

"What have you given her to do?"

"General clerical work," replied the other.

"And who have you given to Edgar Butterworth?"

"Well, Mr. Baxter, you have given me no special instructions with regard to Edgar since the day after our conversation, and so he has kept on at his old job."

"Yes, but I asked you who you had given him as a secretary?"

"I promoted George Lister," replied Nehemiah. "He is past thirty now, and I thought it was time for him to have a move up."

"And what have you done with Miss Townley?"

"Well, for the time she's doing George Lister's work."

Baxter was silent for a few seconds. Then he spoke abruptly. "Isn't that rather a bad move, Nehemiah?"

"How is that?" asked the man.

“Well, in a way you have made Miss Townley suffer because of Edgar’s behavior. By the way,” he added, “her removal from Edgar’s office has not affected her salary, has it?”

“Well, yes, I suppose it has,” replied Nehemiah. “You see, she’s taken George Lister’s place, so naturally she has George Lister’s pay; while Lister, who has taken her place, will have her pay. I am afraid I did not think of it in that way,” added the man a little apologetically.

“I must see about that,” muttered Baxter a little impatiently, as he made a note on the blotting pad before him. By the way, he went on, “does she do her work satisfactorily?”

“Quite,” replied Nehemiah. “She is far more efficient than George Lister, and I am sorry she had to take his place; but it was the best I could do.”

“Thank you, that is all,” rejoined Baxter. “Oh, by the way though, will you send Miss Townley to me?”

A minute later Ruth Townley appeared in the room, and the moment she entered Baxter was again struck by her quiet, lady-like bearing. She was no better dressed than the other girl typists in the room from which she came.

For that matter, her clothes were less expensive, and, if the truth must be told, a little more worn than theirs. Nevertheless, she looked different.

“Miss Townley,” said Baxter, “I must apologize for not sending for you before.”

The girl looked at him curiously. Evidently she did not understand what he meant.

“You remember, of course, when you were here last,” he went on, “that the circumstances were somewhat painful, and—”

“I ought to have written thanking you for your consideration and kindness, Mr. Lancaster,” broke in the girl. “Mr. Blackburn told me that he had had instructions from you to find a place for me, and—and—” The girl flushed almost painfully.

“Yes,” replied Baxter, “I meant to have looked into the matter myself, and I am sorry that it has been delayed so long. Mr. Blackburn tells me that you have taken George Lister’s place, and that he is acting as secretary to Mr. Butterworth. I am sorry for that, especially as, from what Mr. Blackburn tells me, you are receiving George Lister’s salary. I must rectify that immediately.”

“I beg your pardon,” and again the girl flushed as she spoke.

Baxter repeated his words.



“No, Mr. Lancaster, I cannot agree to that,” she said.

“What! You cannot agree to more salary?” he asked with a smile.

“Not under the circumstances,” she replied.

“Why? I don’t understand. I suppose I can pay what I like, can’t I?”

“Perhaps you don’t quite understand, Mr. Lancaster,” the girl said, and this time she flushed a fiery red.

“Understand what?” he asked.

“Perhaps you don’t know, Mr. Lancaster, that Mr. Butterworth is very angry at the change which has been made, and even you can’t stop people from gossiping.”

“Gossiping! Gossiping about what?” and there was anger in Baxter’s voice.

“It may seem like tale-bearing,” was the girl’s response, “but it is the talk of the office that, that—I beg your pardon, Mr. Lancaster, but I would rather say no more about it. You can quickly find out what you want to know.”

Lancaster again looked at Ruth Townley steadily. Yes, she was as different from the ordinary girl typist as summer is different from Winter. She had the appearance of a lady, too; everything proclaimed the fact. She had said nothing, and yet he thought he saw what was in her mind.

“I’ll have things altered at once,” he said. “I will find you a post at least equal to that which you had under Mr. Butterworth.”

“Please, please!” broke in the girl eagerly, “I hope you will do no such thing. While I remain as I am, and work for a lower salary than I had when I was under Mr. Butterworth, they can say nothing; but if you—you see, don’t you? Really, I am not ungrateful. I appreciate your kindness very much; so does my mother. She understands the position exactly.”

“But tell me,” and anger flashed from Baxter’s eyes, “have you any reason to believe that Butterworth has—has—”

“Really, Mr. Lancaster, I Wish you wouldn’t ask me,” persisted the girl. “I am sorry that you sent for me to come here at all. May I go now?” she asked eagerly.

“Certainly, if you wish it,” he said a little coldly, and a moment later the girl had left the room.

Baxter was very angry, and he looked as though he longed to vent his feelings upon someone. But he said nothing for some time. He was sure he had read the girl’s mind correctly, and must act accordingly.

A little later he found his way to Edgar Butterworth's room; but found only a clerk there. "Is Mr. Butterworth here?" he asked the young man.

"No, Mr. Baxter," replied George Lister; "he hasn't come yet. He may be here any minute now," he added. "Shall I tell him that you want to see him?"

"Tell him that I wish to see him half an hour from now," replied Baxter. "Tell him to come to my room," he added.

"Very good," replied George Lister, and then he smiled significantly as he watched the young man walk impatiently away.

"Grandfather has left me in a very difficult position in relation to Edgar," Baxter reflected as he went from department to department in the great block of buildings which generally went by the name of "Lancaster's" in the town. "It is true I am responsible for everything, and yet I do not like interfering unless something is seriously wrong. The African part of our business is, as yet, very small, but it may become important."

At the end of half an hour Baxter was back in his own room again, but Edgar did not appear. Indeed, lunchtime came and went, and still George Lister's promise was not fulfilled.

But Baxter was not idle. He ordered that a résumé of the state of the African department should be placed before him, and by the time that Edgar appeared, which was about four o'clock in the afternoon, he had a rough understanding of how everything stood.

"I am sorry I was not in my office this morning when you called to see me," and Edgar assumed a nonchalant, don't-care-a-hang sort of manner as he entered Baxter's room. "Of course, I don't pretend to keep hours," he added.

"I should judge not," replied Baxter meaningly.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Butterworth fiercely. "I hope you don't expect me to keep hours as though I were a clerk?"

"Perhaps it would be better if you did."

"What is the meaning of that cryptic remark?"

"Just what it seems to mean," replied the other. "I told you some time ago that I should look into the workings of the African department, and act accordingly."

Edgar looked at Baxter for nearly half a minute without speaking. Then he burst out laughing. "Ah! the wind sits in that quarter, does it!" he said

with a sneer. "I thought it might be something of the sort when I heard—what I did hear."

"Perhaps you will explain that," replied the other.

"Oh, you needn't pretend to be a pattern young man!" cried Edgar. "Of course, I knew what you meant when you took away my secretary from me. You may look upon me as a fool, but I am not such a fool as that!"

Baxter's eyes flashed fire, and his lips quivered somewhat; but he held himself in check. Walking to the door of his office, he looked into the adjoining room, and saw that it was empty. Then quietly closing the door, he came back to where Edgar sat. "If you don't mind, you will give me an explanation of what you have just said," he demanded.

"Pooh! Explanation! There's nothing to explain! I know you are spoken of as Mr. Baxter Lancaster, the paragon of all the virtues. I know, too, that ever since the time you came from Cambridge, and during the years when a young fellow is supposed to go the pace a bit, you have been anxious to be looked upon as an intellectual and circumspect young gentleman. But all that kind of eyewash doesn't go down with me!" and again Edgar laughed sneeringly.

"Please go on," said Baxter quietly.

"I think I've gone on enough," replied Edgar.

"More than enough," retorted Baxter significantly; "still, you will kindly explain what you've said."

"What's come over you, Baxter?" exclaimed the other.

"Kindly explain what you said," was the frigid demand.

"Oh, I know," and there was defiance in Edgar Butterworth's voice. "I know you had her in here this morning. Of course, you were very circumspect, and had your typist in the next room; but you asked her a lot of questions, and I've no doubt she told you a lot of lies."

"What is your reason for saying that?" asked Baxter.

"Oh, come, don't try the goody-goody over me!" Edgar almost shouted. "You had your reasons for taking her away from me, I've no doubt; and, in a way, I don't blame you! She's a dashed pretty girl, Baxter! But while she was as cold as an icicle to me, and pretty nearly spat in my face at the least approach of familiarity on my part, you may be more lucky. You are now boss of the show, and one of the richest blokes in the county."

"Is that what you have said in the town?" asked Baxter.

“Well, why shouldn’t I? Who’s to stop me? Isn’t it true?” and Edgar hurled out his questions defiantly.

“Butterworth,” and Baxter’s tones were cold and incisive. “It’s difficult to deal with a cad like you. Nevertheless, that kind of thing must stop.”

“Cad like me, eh!” and Edgar spoke in a furious passion. “But who’s to make me stop? Besides, it’s true!”

“For myself I don’t care a fig,” went on Baxter; “but no one but a cad would hint at such things about a defenseless girl. Anyhow, if another breath of this sort reaches me, I am afraid I shall have to ask you to resign your position here.”

“And what reasons could you give for asking me to resign?” sneered Edgar. “What would you say when the truth came out that I simply told facts about the girl you stole from me?”

“Then you confess to having spread these reports?”

“Pah! you hypocrite!” retorted the other, “and she is as bad as you! As I said a little while ago, she’s been in here telling you a pack of lies!”

“Stop!” cried Baxter. “If you are referring to Miss Townley, she has never said a word to me. As you know, too, there’s not a word of truth in what you have said. I have never spoken to her from the day she came here in this room, nearly a fortnight ago, until this morning.”

“Who would believe that?” exclaimed Edgar.

“At any rate,” said Baxter, “I am determined to put an end to this contemptible gossip. Please bear that in mind!”

“And if you can’t?” demanded Edgar defiantly.

“Then Lancaster’s will have no further use for you.”

Again Edgar laughed. “It would sound well in the town, wouldn’t it, if Baxter Lancaster sacked his cousin because of a girl?”

“At any rate, if you do not stop spreading these contemptible lies,” and Baxter lifted his voice somewhat, “you will have to go!”

Edgar was startled. He had never heard Baxter speak in that tone of voice before; but he would not yield without a struggle. “Do you mean to say, then,” he demanded, “that you are going to sack me?”

“You can put it that way if you like.”

“And what reasons would you give?”

“Perhaps I shouldn’t choose to give any reasons at all,” replied the other.

“No, Baxter Lancaster, that will not do! You may be the boss of Lancaster’s, but you can’t discharge anyone so easily as all that! I’ll have

you up for wrongful dismissal, and I'll fight you to the last breath!"

"Very well," said Baxter quietly. "If you will call on the cashier on your way out, I will see that you have a month's pay in lieu of notice; and will you remember that I shall have nothing more to do with you from today."

"But, Baxter!" Edgar protested after nearly a minute's silence. "You—you can't mean that?"

"But I do mean it. As you know, there is not even a suggestion of truth in the reports you have spread, and I am determined to put a stop to them."

"But can you put a stop to them like that?" cried Edgar. "Supposing I am chucked out from here, can you make me hold my tongue?"

"At least, I can make you prove what you say," replied Lancaster. "And I will, too; remember that! I shall be sorry to do so because, as you have reminded me more than once, there is a distant blood relationship between us. I know, too, that my grandfather took you on here and created a post for you, because you were practically on the streets, and because your mother pleaded with him to do something for you. Besides, apart from all this, I have every reason for discharging you. I have gone into the details of our South African department, and I find it has been shamefully mismanaged and neglected. From today, therefore, it will be placed in other hands; while you will kindly relieve the place of your presence."

Edgar was now thoroughly subdued. He had formed an utterly false conception of Baxter's character, and had also got an utterly wrong impression concerning his own importance. In reality he was a bully and a coward, and had crumpled up like burnt paper at Baxter's words. "But, Baxter!" he pleaded. "You don't mean it? You—you won't sack me? Why, it would kill my mother if you did, and—and what could I do?"

"Have I anything to do with that?" replied the young man.

"But—but my mother always speaks of your grandfather as her uncle, and—and—"

When Edgar left Baxter's office an hour later he was utterly changed. His defiant attitude had gone. He besought Baxter with sobs in his voice to keep him on at the works, and made all sorts of wild promises never, in any way, to offend him again.

"Now why have I done that?" asked Baxter of himself when Edgar had left him alone. "Why have I taken the trouble to keep him from spreading lies about that girl? She is nothing to me; never can be! And yet—"

He sat back in his chair and closed his eyes, while the picture of the girl about whom he had thought so much that day loomed up before him. Quiet, ladylike; yes, and beautiful. For she was beautiful. No doubt that was the reason why Edgar had become so enamored with her. By nature, too, she was a happy-looking girl. There was laughter in her eyes, mirth on her lips —

All the same, she was nothing to him; never could be. She was as utterly unknown to him as she was to the town." From what he could gather, she had come to Baronstown a year or so before with her invalid mother. No one knew anything about her, except that she had come from a distance, and that she made no friends among those with whom she worked.

He made inquiries as to how she had become employed at Lancaster's, and had discovered that a few months before it had been given out in the town that owing to the fact that Lancaster's had bought a large merchant business which they intended to work in conjunction with their Baronstown operations, a number of new typists would be required, and this girl had made her application with the rest. As far as he could learn, the testimonials she had given were of the vaguest character, but her qualifications were so good that she had been taken on without a question.

Beyond that he knew practically nothing of her, and after Edgar had left him, he more than once called himself a fool for taking an interest in her.

And yet he was glad that he had. At least, it gave him a sense of satisfaction that he had befriended a friendless girl, and stopped his *soi-disant* cousin from spreading reports about her. In a way he could not understand, too, he was glad that she had met Edgar's overtures with the scorn that they deserved, and that she had treated him with contempt.

When Baxter returned to Barons Court that evening he found his grandfather, instead of being out in the grounds as he usually was, seated in his own—Baxter's—study, where he had caused a fire to be lit.

The old man looked shriveled and haggard, too; and in spite of the heat of the room, he shivered more than once.

"Aren't you well, grandfather?"

"Nay, lad. I think I've got a bit of a cold, but it's nothing to bother about."

Baxter looked at his grandfather anxiously. Somehow, he could not tell why it was, but ever since Eliza Stuttard had died he had watched his grandfather with more than usual solicitude.

“Anything happened downtown today, my lad?” asked the old man of his grandson.

Thereupon Baxter told him of his experience with Edgar.

Evidently old Amos was pleased with his grandson’s behavior, for he seemed to forget his own ailments as he listened to Baxter’s story. “The young fool!” he exclaimed. “He’s just like a bantam cock; he’s that vain that he thinks Lancaster’s exists for his benefit!”

“Well, I made him feel that it didn’t,” replied Baxter.

“And serve him right, too!” rejoined the old man. “What did you say the lass’s name was?”

Baxter told him.

“Ruth Townley? Ay, I remember her being employed, but I know nothing about her. When I come to think about it, though, she struck me as being a superior lass.”

“She is altogether superior,” replied Baxter. “When I first saw her some time ago I could hardly believe that we had a young woman of that caliber working for us.”

“Townley, didn’t you say?” ejaculated the old man after a long silence.

“Yes, Ruth Townley.”

“It’s a good name,” exclaimed old Amos presently. “One of the oldest and best in Lancashire. Still—”

The old man was silent for more than a minute. Then he went on: “You remember what I said to you on your birthday, Baxter?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Have you done anything about it yet?”

“In what way?”

“Have you spoken to that lass of Sir William Templeton?”

Baxter shook his head.

“I wish you would.”

“Why should I? I am very well as I am.”

“Nay, nay, you’re not,” replied old Amos. “I’m fair worrying myself about it.”

“About what?”

“That—and other things. There’s a look in your eyes which I don’t like. It tells me that you are hungering for something which you haven’t got. It doesn’t matter about me, I am nearly done for; but you are young, and have your life all before you. As I’ve told you more than once, I’ve nothing to

live for, except to see you happy. Yes, and I'd give every penny I've got if I could make you happy!"

"Why are you talking that way, grandfather? Has anything happened?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary. I've been thinking of the two years I had with your grandmother. Ay, we wur happy! I've been noan happy since. Ay, life's a weary business if you have no one to love you."

"Do you find it weary, grandfather?"

"In a way I do. I thought when I slackened off at the mill a bit I should find life better worth living, but there's nowt in it, lad. That's why I've become so anxious about you!"

"You needn't be anxious about me, grandfather I I'm all right!"

"No, you are not. Perhaps I've seen farther into your heart than you have yourself. Anyhow, I've watched you, and thought about you, and I have come to the conclusion that you will never be happy until you marry some lass that you love. I cannot last much longer, Baxter."

"Nonsense, grandfather!"

"I shall soon be eighty, and I'd like to see you fixed up before I die. She's a fine lass, Baxter!"

"Who is?"

"That Templeton lass. Fix it up, lad; fix it up right away! Wilt'a promise me something?"

"I will if I can. What do you want me to promise?"

"Go and see her tomorrow, and kiss her, lad; kiss her!"

"Why should I if I don't want to?"

"Don't you feel you could love her?"

"And if I don't?"

"It will come, Baxter. She's young, she's bonny, she has a good old name, she belongs to the aristocracy, and if you married her—who knows?" and the old man chuckled meaningly. "You might, with Sir William Templeton's influence and your money, get a peerage. Others have. Promise me you will go over tomorrow, Baxter—or, for that matter, why not go tonight? I may not live long, and I want to see you happy, lad."

"Tonight?" queried the young man.

"Ay. Have you anything particular on tonight?"

"No, nothing particular. I promised to play bridge at the club, that's all."

"Play bridge! What's the good of that?" asked the old man. -



“Not much,” replied Baxter. “It’s a bit of distraction, that’s all. When you are playing you forget other things, and—and it’s a gamble—just like marriage is. When you have good cards you win, and when you haven’t you lose; and that’s pretty nearly all about it!”

“Then you’ll go to Templeton Court tonight?” exclaimed the old man eagerly.

“I can’t,” replied the other. “I must keep my promise.”

“Ay, lad, tha must keep thy promise,” assented the old man. “But tomorrow?”

## 15. Templeton Court

BAXTER TRIED TO PERSUADE his grandfather to allow him to ' keep him company that night; but the old man would have none of it. "I am not going to die just yet," he announced, "although I do feel a bit poorly. I don't play cards myself, but I am not going to try and stop you if you want to play. Do you enjoy it, lad?"

"In a way," replied Baxter. "It's only a little exciting, that's all, and there is precious little in life to excite one."

So, soon after dinner that night, Baxter went to his club in the town, and fulfilled his promise to some young men with whom he had made an engagement. At midnight, however, when he left the club, he did not appear to be much exhilarated by the evening. He had won just three shillings and ninepence at bridge; he had drunk two whiskies and sodas, and, as far as he could see, the evening had been wasted.

"Coming tomorrow night, Baxter?" asked a young manufacturer who went by the name of Ben Bolton.

"I don't think so, thanks."

"Why not?"

"What's the use?" parried Baxter.

"One must do something," was the reply, "and playing bridge is better than going to Manchester every night."

"And is that all life is?" the young man asked himself as he made his way towards Baronstown. "It is better to stay here and play bridge, because there is more fun in it, than going to Manchester! Great heavens! more fun in it! If that's the case, it seems to me that one might as well die as live!"

The night was almost cloudless. It being midnight, the mills had all ceased working, and scarcely any smoke was emitted from the mill chimneys. A light breeze having sprung up, too, everything in the shape of clouds was, being blown away towards the Yorkshire hills, and thus Baronstown was not, as was usually the case, wrapped in a mantle of smoke.

He had purposely walked to his club in order to obtain a little exercise, and thus, although it was past midnight, he was walking the distance which lay between the town and his old home. As far as he could judge, too, everyone was abed. Scarcely a single light was seen shining from any of the windows, while the streets were deserted.

Presently he heard quick, hurried footsteps coming towards him. Evidently, whoever the belated traveler might be, he or she was in a hurry. A few seconds later a female figure drew near him. Being just under a lamppost at that moment, the light fell brightly upon the road and revealed her face.

Baxter could not help feeling startled. "Good night, Miss Townley," he said. "You are out late?"

She made no reply, save to utter a choking, sob-like sound which meant nothing to him, save that she seemed in trouble.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

But he got no answer to his question. Before he had time to realize what was happening, she had gone a good many yards down the street.

He felt like following her; he wanted to know why she was there, and, if needs be, to offer her help. But he decided he had better not. Such an action on his part might be misconstrued, especially if any other belated traveler were passing.

But why was the girl out so late at night? He wondered if she had an engagement with a lover, or anything of that sort, and he experienced a feeling like disappointment as a consequence. But no; he was sure that if she had been out to meet a lover he would have seen her home, and would not have allowed her to be rushing along the streets at midnight alone. Still, what else could it mean?

He felt uncomfortable, although why he should he did not know. He had no business to interfere with the actions of his employees after office hours. All the same, he could not help wondering, neither could he keep from feeling uncomfortable about the sound, which seemed to him like a sob Of anguish, which had escaped the girl's lips.

Dawn was beginning to pierce the windows of his bedroom before he fell asleep.

But he was up betimes the following morning, and getting out his car, he reached his office before eight o'clock. The postman had already arrived, and a huge pile of correspondence lay on the desk before him.

Less than an hour later he had gone through his letters, and with the exception of three which required special consideration, he had dictated to his secretary the kind of replies he wished her to make.

“Is all the clerical staff here?” he asked Nehemiah Blackburn as he left the Lancaster buildings.

“I believe so, Mr. Baxter,” replied the man; “but, we’ve all been a bit pressed this morning, and I haven’t had time to notice.”

“That’s all right,” was Baxter’s reply. Nevertheless, he could not help wondering again why Ruth Townley was out so late on the previous night.

When he reached Barons Court he saw that his grandfather was seated at the breakfast table, and, as far as he could judge, much improved in health. “Only one letter for you, Baxter, my lad,” announced old Amos as he nodded towards Baxter’s plate, “but, unless I am mistaken, that one will be of particular interest.”

“Why?” asked Baxter.

“Because it has the Templeton crest on it,” laughed the old man significantly.

Looking at the envelope, Baxter saw that his grandfather had not been mistaken. He noted, too, that the address was in Evelyn’s handwriting.

“It seems a pretty long screed, Baxter,” laughed Amos, when the young man had torn the envelope open. “Three pages! What has that lass to say to you which requires three pages?”

Baxter did not reply, except that he laughed gaily; while the old man’s eyes sparkled to see the flush which mounted his cheeks.

“What does she want, lad?” queried old Amos again.

“Let me finish her letter, and I will tell you,” replied Baxter.

Yes, he could not help feeling a thrill of pleasure as he noted the way she addressed him.

Dear Mr. Baxter (he read),

Yes, I am calling you that, although I told you when we last met that my Christian name was Evelyn, without a prefix. Why don’t you use it? But I’ll say no more about that now.

I want your advice and assistance, that is why I have taken the liberty of writing to you. Is it a liberty? We are arranging for a kind of garden party, or open-air affair, here soon, and we are inviting a number of friends to be present. What do you think about having a fortuneteller here? Father doesn't like the idea, but I do. Lots of people want to know their future, and I am sure that fortune-telling would be a big feature. Don't you think so?

But the thing about which I want your advice is this: Shall we get an up-to-date palmist who has told fortunes in all sorts of places, including Kenilworth Castle, Winchester Towers, and a host of other similar places, or a real old-fashioned Gypsy? On the whole, I prefer the Gypsy. But, as I said, I want your advice, and I am getting them both here tomorrow afternoon to give specimens—if that's the right word—of their power to read the future.

Now you can see what I want, can't you? You must come here to tea, and you must be prepared to give me the advice I need. You will, won't you? It's weeks and weeks ago since you were here, and I have been afraid lest I have done or said something to offend you. But I haven't, have I? I wouldn't for worlds. So put on your thinking cap, and be here not later than four. I shall take no excuse.

Yours sincerely, Evelyn Templeton.

He noticed that the writing was of a rather scrawl-like nature. He saw, too, that there was a blot on the word "sincerely," while the name "Templeton" was almost indecipherable. He reflected, therefore, in reading the termination of her letter a second time that it was her evident desire that he should only read the words "Yours, Evelyn." At any rate, he could not help believing that that was what she intended to convey. Of course, it was very flattering. To have such a letter written to him by a girl of Evelyn Templeton's position was enough to turn anyone's head. Was not Templeton one of the oldest names in Lancashire? And would not Sir William, at the death of an aged relative, inherit a peerage? It was true that all the Templetons were as poor as Job's turkey. Still, they were Templetons, and thus—

He read the letter to his grandfather.

Old Amos chuckled. "Didn't I tell you so? Her letter says very plainly 'come and kiss me.' So don't be a fool any longer, my lad."

"Do you really wish me to go to Templeton Court, grandfather?" asked Baxter.

"Ay, my lad, I do. There is no one else, is there?"

"No," he replied, after hesitating for a few seconds.

He felt he was justified in saying this. Of course, he remembered what he had said to Peggy Edgecumbe; but she had turned him down. Her answer to his plea had been so decisive that he felt it would be foolish for him to think about her any more. A desire to speak to her had come to him suddenly on his twenty-eighth birthday, and he had yielded to that desire. But Peggy Edgecumbe had said no. She had said it scornfully, too, as though what he had said to her were an insult.

*"The love of a lifetime!" she had answered. "The, love of a lump of clay! For that's all it means, Mr. Lancaster!"*

He had thought of these words a hundred times since she had spoken them, and every time he had called them to memory they had rankled. Perhaps they had rankled all the more because he had felt their truth. Besides, there was his friend to consider. Stephen Wallace had also spoken to her on the day of the fête, and while she had also refused him, it was for a reason altogether different from that which led her to answer him, Baxter, in the negative.

He remembered also his conversation with Stephen Wallace. As far as he could judge, Wallace seemed certain of Peggy Edgecumbe's affection. And while he had told his friend that in love and war everyone must fight for himself, he had, in a way he could not understand, felt no bitterness that Wallace should succeed, where he had failed.

At three o'clock that afternoon he had signed the letters which his secretary had placed before him, and had got out his two-seater car.

"They are in the next room," Evelyn Templeton informed him, as after tea at Templeton Court he sat talking with her and Sir William.

"Who are in the next room?"

"The modern palmist and the ancient Gypsy," laughed the girl. "Dad is awfully angry with me, aren't you, dad?"

"Of course I am," replied Sir William. "I am strongly prejudiced against anything which smacks of the supernatural, and you have declared it to be your intention to give it out among your guests that this is not going to be playing at fortune-telling, but real prophesying. That's what I object to. Don't you agree with me, Lancaster?"

"No, I don't think I do," replied Baxter. "Whatever Miss Templeton may announce, everyone will regard it as in the nature of a hoax."

"But it won't be a hoax!" protested Evelyn. "Both the man and the woman are real seers, and what they tell will surely come to pass. I really

am in earnest, Baxter,” and this time she allowed the prefix to drop as though it were natural to do so.

“Then where do I come in?” he asked with a laugh.

“You are to choose whether I have the man or the woman to predict the future,” replied the girl.

“And may I be present at the interview?” asked Sir William.

“Of course you may not,” proclaimed Evelyn. “How can Baxter decide if you are present? He has come here for the distinct purpose of testing these two people, and of telling me which I must choose.”

In spite of himself, Baxter felt a little chagrined when the girl used his name so freely, and without any apparent hesitation, when her father was present. He felt, although he could not have told why, that this girl was forging a chain which bound him to her, and that her every word meant a new link in the chain.

“Anyhow, I have uttered my protest,” exclaimed Sir William. “Whether these people profess to deal in hocus-pocus, or whether they claim to be real soothsayers, I wash my hands of the whole matter. If Lancaster likes to encourage you in your silly fancies, it’s his affair, not mine!” and he left the room as he spoke.

“Shall we go to them now?” laughed the girl. She caught his arm as she spoke and looked smilingly into his face.

“Yes, let’s go,” he said.

He thought she seemed disappointed, and he believed that she would rather they remained alone in the room than that they should go to interview the fortune-tellers.

“Wait a moment,” she whispered as they drew near the door which separated them from the room where the palmist and the Gypsy awaited them. “You are not vexed with me, are you?”

“Vexed with you, Miss Templeton!”

“There!” and she pouted as if annoyed. “I don’t believe you want to ——” She hesitated a second, and, then went on: “You don’t seem to believe that I am serious about these fortune-tellers.”

“Of course not!” he laughed. “Who would be?”

“You’ll be in a few minutes,” was her reply. “Don’t you think I am in earnest, Baxter? I am, in real, deadly earnest; only—I’ll not go on with this business if you don’t like it,” she added. “I wouldn’t offend you for anything.”

They were standing some distance from the door as she spoke, and her voice was low and compelling. It seemed to him, too, as though there was something like a spell in the words she was uttering; something which was binding him.

“Let’s go in,” he said abruptly.

Directly they had entered the room Baxter felt his old self again. He no longer felt that some kind of a charm was being woven by Evelyn Templeton; rather a sense of the ludicrous possessed him.

Standing close by the mantelpiece was a man. He was attired in a kind of Egyptian uniform, while his features were partially covered by a white mask. The uniform consisted of a long flowing robe, embroidered with mystical designs, while on his head was an old-fashioned Egyptian turban which was also covered with what might be ancient Egyptian writings. The man came towards them as they entered the room, and bowed low.

“What’s the meaning of this?” Baxter asked himself. “Does she believe that I, or any sensible person, can think of these people seriously?”

“What am I to do?” he asked aloud.

“You are to tell me which I am to choose as the fortuneteller,” laughed the girl.

“Of course, I shall vote for the lady,” replied Baxter with a laugh.

“Oh, but that will not do! You must test them.”

“How can I test them?”

“Now don’t be silly, Baxter,” and the girl spoke as though she were deadly in earnest. “Neither of these people is an ordinary charlatan. As I have been trying to tell you, everyone will be able to depend implicitly upon what they say. That is why I am so anxious as to which of them I shall choose.”

“But how can I tell which of them you shall choose?” he queried.

“That’s easy enough. Neither of them knows who you are, or anything about you. Each of them will tell you your past, present and your future as they see it, and you are to decide which tells you the most truly. Then it will depend upon you which I select as the fortune-teller.”

In spite of himself, and in spite, too, of the utter foolishness of what the girl had said, a strange atmosphere seemed to permeate the room. In one way everything was unreal, and unworthy of attention. In another, however, all was different. He felt that the air was destiny-laden; that something was going to happen on which his whole future depended.



Again he looked at the man who stood near the mantelpiece, and saw, in spite of the mask he wore, his black, piercing eyes fixed upon him. Of course it was all a part of the hocus-pocus which was being arranged for; but the man's flowing robe covered with mystical designs, the foreign-looking turban on which he thought he saw ancient writings, and the curious-looking mask all suggested the uncanny.

Then he looked at the other side of the room where, near a window which led into a conservatory, he saw the bent form of an old Gypsy-looking woman. Saw, too, that this ancient-looking dame was looking at him eagerly. "Which one am I to interview first?" he asked.

"Which you like," replied Evelyn. "Of course," she added, "I claim the right of being present."

"No," laughed Baxter, "that will not do. I can allow no one to be present while my past, present and future are unfolded. Will you, therefore, take the lady into the conservatory while this Egyptian-looking chap tells his story."

Why it was he could not tell, but he felt as though an understanding existed between the two women who watched him. Still, they did as he had bidden them, and a minute later he was left alone with the man. "You heard what the lady said?" and Baxter laughed as he spoke. "It seems that I am to decide whether you or the ancient dame in the conservatory is to be selected to come here to tell fortunes. Well, go ahead," and he held out his hand to the man as he spoke.

A minute later the man had taken a piece of magnifying glass from beneath the folds of his garment, and was looking steadily at the palm of his hand. It was more than a minute before he spoke.

"Remember," said Baxter, "I am as critical as they make 'em, so don't imagine you can pass off any hocus-pocus on me."

"Am I to speak freely?" asked the so-called magician presently.

"By all means."

"Remember, I never saw you before; have not the slightest idea who you are," urged the so-called magician.

"Go ahead," laughed Baxter.

Whereupon the man gave him an outline of his life which suggested that he was intimate with his upbringing, his characteristics and his history. "Have I not spoken truly?" asked the man presently.

"You have spoken so truly that it makes me jolly uncomfortable," laughed Baxter. "Still, I have to take your statement that you never saw or

heard anything of me before on trust. As it happens, I am pretty well known in Baronstown, and a dozen people there could have told me what you have told me. So much for the past and present, therefore; but let's have the future."

The Egyptian took another piece of glass from his robe, which seemed to be not only more powerful than that which he had used, but which also altered the color of his hand. Then, after having looked at it for the second time, he gave a deep sigh.

"What's the matter?" asked Baxter.

"May I look at your face, your eyes?" asked the man, and Baxter could not help noticing that not only was his voice husky and tremulous, but that the perspiration stood in thick beads over his forehead and was finding its way underneath the mask.

"By all means," replied Baxter. "Shall we go to the light?"

"If howajja will," replied the man.

Baxter led the way to a window which caught the light of the western sky, and stood still while the man looked at him steadily.

"I refuse to try to tell your future," he said at length.

"Why? Are you afraid?" laughed Baxter.

"Yes," replied the man.

"Why are you afraid?"

"You think I am play-acting," was the man's rejoinder, "but I am not. Of course, it would be easy for me to tell you the usual tale, but I refuse to do so."

"Why do you refuse to do so?"

The man looked fearfully around the room. "Come back to the fire-place again," he said. "They can hear us from here. I am not going to try to tell your future," and his voice was tremulous. "But if you will take my advice, accept nothing, believe nothing. Oh yes, I know I shall possibly lose a five-guinea engagement because of what I am saying now, but even although I am a charlatan and a make-believe, I have still some remains of manhood in me; and, at least, I have enough of the magician to know the difference between truth and lies."

There was such a change in the man's voice, as well as in his whole demeanor, that Baxter was startled. "Look here," he said peremptorily, "you have said too much, or else you have not said enough. Why have you dried up like this?"

“Because I daren’t go on,” replied the man. “Because —because— Don’t you see how I am suffering?” and Baxter found it impossible not to detect the pain in the man’s voice.

“At least, tell me this,” and Baxter spoke seriously. “Are you sincere in telling me that you know nothing about me? That you never saw or heard of me until today, and that what you told me about my past you read from my hand?”

“That’s true,” replied the man. “I know nothing of you. As Heaven is my witness, I have said nothing to you but the truth. But for God’s sake don’t ask me to tell you your future.”

“Why?”

“Because it may be too ghastly for words. Because you may struggle for a shadow, and miss the Crown of life; because— No, I refuse to say anything more about it. Good day, sir.”

He had lost the Eastern manner of speaking with which he had commenced, and spoke now in tones which anyone might use.

“Is this a part of a prepared method of treating gullible fools?” thought the young man. “But no, the altered tones might have been a part of the bag of tricks; so might the changed manner of speech; so might the trembling hand. But surely the perspiration which is still trickling under the mask cannot be a part of a trick.”

“Look here,” Baxter said to him in low tones, “I don’t know you from Adam, and you may be the greatest trickster who ever tried to force lies upon gullible fools; but you speak like an honest man. Have you anything real or definite to say to me?”

“I have something real and definite I could say to you,” replied the man, and his voice vibrated with passion.

He moved away from the man, and as he did so he realized that, to say the least of it, his interview was not what he had expected it would be. He realized, too, that Evelyn Templeton was alone with the Gypsy woman in the adjoining conservatory.

“Yes, Miss Templeton,” he shouted aloud, “I have finished with this man now,” then he added with a laugh, “and I am waiting for what the lady has to say.”

“Do you think I had better wait?” whispered the man.

“Use your own judgment,” was Lancaster’s reply. “I shall say nothing.”

“Thank you, sir,” replied the man. “And remember that little events often contain great warnings, and that although delays may be dangerous, they may also be”use.”

He made his way to the door opposite that which led to the conservatory as he spoke, while Evelyn Templeton and the Gypsy woman came towards him. The former caught his arm, and led him to the other side of the room. “Did he impress you?” she asked.

“He’s a remarkable fellow,” replied Baxter.

“I’ve heard all sorts of things about him,” whispered the girl. “He was at the Marquess of — only a week or two ago, and he simply electrified several of the guests. He told them things which could only have been revealed by a magician, and—and— But I must not prejudice you.”

His interview with the Gypsy woman did not take long. The old woman spoke glibly and with apparent conviction, but after what had passed between him and the man, it struck Baxter that the old woman’s story was nothing but what might be expected from any Gypsy fortune-teller. Like the ordinary fortune-teller, too, she was careful not to say anything definite with regard to the future. She used honeyed terms to him; she tried to flatter his vanity, and promised him a rosy future. But there was no touch of reality which had characterized the man’s words.

Presently he was left alone with Evelyn Templeton. “I don’t know why I am so much in earnest about this,” the girl said to him. “Ever since I’ve decided to have fortune-telling as a part of our program, I’ve laughed at myself for being so serious. But I can’t help it; I become simply fanatical. I am sure that something more than ordinary depends upon their coming. Tell me which of the two I shall select, Baxter.”

Again the way she spoke his name seemed like a caress, and again, also, he felt as though she were weaving a charm around him. “Which do you favor yourself?” he evaded.

“I don’t know. I should like to leave the choice with you.”

“Why?” he asked.

“Because you are so wise, so strong.”

“Wise! Strong!” he repeated with a laugh. “There’s no necessity for wisdom or strength in order to choose which is the bigger liar, the man or the woman.”

“But you know what I mean, Baxter,” and still she persisted in calling him by his Christian name, although he had not once used hers.

She seemed to be on the point of making a great decision, and much as she had often appealed to him in the past, she never seemed so fair or so full of charm as now.

As we have said, both the man and the woman had left the room, and he, Baxter Lancaster, and Evelyn Templeton were alone together. As it seemed to him, the girl had by the very means she had used to bring him there, as well as by her smiles and her very presence, told him that she was his for the asking. He knew, too, that when he had left Baronstown that afternoon he had practically made up his mind to ask her to be his wife. Not that his heart had gone out with the thought, but old Amos Lancaster had urged it upon him, and it had seemed to him that the old man's happiness depended upon his wedding her.

And yet he hesitated.

"Have you ever seen our picture gallery?" asked the girl, changing her tones.

"Never," he replied. "Have you a picture gallery?"

"Many of the Templetons long since dead are there," she replied. "Come, and I will show them to you."

She led him up a flight of stairs, and along a corridor until they entered a room full of paintings, which were mainly portraits of Templetons long since dead.

"Are these all Templetons?" he asked.

"Every one of them," was her reply. "Nearly all of them, however, are dead. It's a ghastly thought, isn't it? But never mind that now. I want to show you one in particular, and I want you to tell me what you think of her."

A minute later they stood before the painting of a lady who was clad in the garb of a century before, but whose face was so much like that of Evelyn Templeton that he was startled. "Who is it?" he asked.

"Who is she like?" asked the girl.

"It might be you," he said.

"I pray Heaven that I may be saved from her fate, anyhow," and the girl's voice was hoarse and unnatural.

"Why? What was her fate?"

"Tell me what you think of her face first."

"She is very beautiful," he replied. "She is the most beautiful woman in the whole gallery."

“And yet her ending was the saddest. She was the only one in the whole gallery who was called Evelyn, and—and—I am almost afraid to tell you, Baxter.”

“Why?” he asked, and he felt her hand trembling upon his arm.

“Because she loved a man who regarded himself as beneath her in rank, but who loved her as much as she loved him, although he dared not tell her so. She died of a broken heart,” she added.

Baxter felt in the throes of a great temptation. For the time, at all events, he was like a man in a trance. On the one hand, all his thoughts and hopes were swallowed up in the fact that he was standing alone with an enchantress whom he longed to possess. For the moment, at all events, nothing else mattered. She was the goal of his heart’s desire; she would fulfill his fondest dreams; she would satisfy his dearest longings. And yet in spite of all this, everything seemed a mockery. Behind the fair face of this beautiful woman whose eyes flashed into his, he could see a grinning skull; and although the girl’s tones were honeyed and caressing, he seemed to hear in and through them the hoarse croaking of a raven. He was sure that she was his for the asking. More than that, he felt that she had taken him to this spot, and told him the story of the one-time Evelyn Templeton in order that he might be led to declare himself.

But she did not appeal to the spiritual in him; neither did he, while in her presence, realize that there was anything beyond the world in which they now lived. Her appeal was only to his senses, only to that which was for today. And yet he stood there like one enthralled, and, in a way, he longed for her more than anything he longed for on earth. She seemed to satisfy his heart’s cravings, while ambition found its fulfillment in her.

His heart was beating rapidly, and he found himself yielding as if to a mesmeric power. He wanted to struggle, and set himself at liberty. Yet he longed for the slavery which threatened him.

Why did he not speak to this girl who was waiting for him to declare himself? Why did he not take her in his arms, and tell her what he was sure she wanted to hear?

He heard his grandfather’s voice saying: “Kiss her, lad; kiss her!” and he was on the point of obeying his behest. Then he heard another voice: “*The love of a lifetime! The love of a lump of clay! For that’s all it means!*”

A moment later he was like a man who had suddenly awakened out of a trance. He heard knocking at the door of the gallery. This was followed by

the entrance of a servant who apologized for coming.

“What is it, Singleton?” Evelyn Templeton did not speak to the man with the same voice as that with which she had spoken to him. Her tones were harsh and, as it seemed to him, angry.

“I am sorry,” replied the man. “It’s a telephone message for Mr. Baxter Lancaster, and, from what the man said to me, it is very important.”

## 16. Peggy Edgecumbe's Uncle

“WILL YOU TELL HIM I will come at once?” Baxter said to the Waiting servant.

“Very good, sir,” and closing the door behind him, the man left them alone.

“Must you go?” she whispered.

“I am afraid I must. I gave instructions before leaving my office that I was to be rung up if anything important happened, but not else. I took the liberty of giving your telephone number,” he added, “so they know where I am, and I am sure they wouldn't ring me up unless it were absolutely necessary.”

The girl pouted in her anger. “Don't be long, Baxter,” she whispered. “I'll wait for you here.”

“Thank you,” he said. “I won't be a minute.”

He rushed to the door as he spoke; while she stood before the picture of the Evelyn Templeton who lived in this very house more than a century before.

He paused a second on opening the door, and looked towards the girl. Yes, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She smiled at him, too, and her smile was Winsome. It was more than Winsome, it was seductive. Her words rang in his ears. “Don't be long, Baxter. I'll wait for you here.”

Directly he had closed the door, however, and was passing down the stairs towards the telephone-room, the atmosphere changed. It was no longer laden with the romance caused by a beautiful woman's presence. Everything became harsh and commonplace again. Why was he there? He had come ostensibly for the purpose of deciding as to who should be the fortune-teller on a certain date. But was that the real reason? It had all been a subterfuge. Had he not been asked to come there that day because—?

He found himself thinking of his interview with the so-called Egyptian soothsayer. What had caused the man to throw off his mantle of deceit, and



speaking as though he were honest? He found himself repeating the fellow's words, especially the words with which they had parted. "And remember that little events often contain great warnings, and that although delays may be dangerous, they may also be wise."

He had thought nothing of them at the time, but now the words seemed destiny-laden. He remembered that on the previous occasion he had been at Templeton Court it had been a telephone message which had caused him to refrain from declaring himself. Ought he not to regard this message as weighted with some great meaning? A telephone call was a little event, but might it not have come at that moment for some great purpose? At any rate, it had given him the opportunity of delaying, and a delay might be wise.

And yet, in a way he could not understand, he was under the spell of Evelyn Templeton's eyes.

He went to the telephone-room and lifted the receiver. "Yes, who's there?"

"Is that Mr. Baxter Lancaster?"

"Speaking. That's Nehemiah Blackburn, isn't it? What do you want?"

"You will excuse my ringing you up, Mr. Baxter," and there was an anxious note in Blackburn's voice, "but I thought you would like to know. You remember Edgar Butterworth's late secretary, don't you?"

"Miss Townley? Of course I remember! What of her?"

"She hasn't been to the office at all today."

"But you surely haven't rung me up to tell me that?"

"Not altogether, Mr. Baxter. All the same, I thought you would like to know. Two minutes ago I got a message from her. Her mother is ill, and from what I can make out, she is dying. That's the reason she hasn't been today. Forgive me if I have done wrong, Mr. Baxter, but I thought you would like to know."

He felt as though a cold hand had been placed upon his heart. And yet why should it be so? Ruth Townley was only one of a number of typists that Lancaster's employed, and he couldn't be expected to be interested in the relations of these typists. Besides, she was a comparative stranger to the town, and he knew nothing of her mother. Why, then, should Nehemiah Blackburn's message cause him to have such strange feelings? For that matter, why should Nehemiah think it necessary to inform him at all?

He called to mind his journey home from the club on the previous night. Remembered, too, the rushing footsteps, and the hoarse, sob-like utterance

of Ruth Townley as she passed him. Yes, it became plain now.

He had wondered why she was out so late. Of course, she had been to see the doctor, and had doubtless urged him to come to see her mother. He wished he had known before. Yet why should he? He couldn't have done anything.

"Have I done right in ringing you up, Mr. Baxter?" the voice continued.

"Certainly, Nehemiah. By the way, will you convey to Miss Townley my sympathy?"

"Yes, I will, and—and—I think she wanted to know, Mr. Baxter, although she didn't say so, if she might stay away from the office until she knew what was going to happen."

"Yes, yes, of course. Tell her so, by all means."

"I hope I have done right?" and there was an anxious tone in Nehemiah Blackburn's voice.

"Quite right, thank you," and he hung up the receiver.

Well, it wasn't so serious after all. It was only a message to tell him that a typist's mother was ill. For that matter, he would, under some circumstances, be almost angry that anyone should disturb him with such a message. And yet—

He remembered what Evelyn Templeton and he had been talking about when the man had interrupted them by telling him that he, Baxter, was wanted on the telephone. He remembered the tones of the girl's voice, the dangerous flash in her eyes. Yes, he had been almost on the point of declaring himself. He had—

*"The love of a lifetime!—the love of a lump of clay! For that's all it means!"*

The words rang in his ears, and they seemed charged with a great meaning.

After all, what did his love for Evelyn Templeton mean?— No, he was not in love with her at all. He coveted the position which his union with her would give him, and, in a way, he coveted her. But his love for her, if he loved her at all, was only the love of a lifetime; the love of a lump of clay.

Should he go back to her? Yes, he must. Whatever happened, he must not act like a boor, a clown.

He left the telephone-room, and made his way towards the stairs which led to the picture gallery.

"Have you finished telephoning?"

He heard the girl's footsteps as she came towards him; while her laughing voice thrilled him. "There's nothing wrong, is there?"

Quick as lightning he saw that her words gave him an opening, and that if he were wise he would make use of it. "I am afraid there is," he said. "I am afraid that I must leave you."

"Leave me, Baxter? But you mustn't! I can't allow it! Besides— No, I can't allow it!"

She seemed like one pleading for something—nay, fighting for it; and in a way he could not understand, he felt that he was again falling beneath her spell. "I must go," he said hurriedly. "I must go at once."

"No, no, really I can't let you go like this, Baxter!"

"It is more than half-past five," he said, although why he uttered the words he could not tell. They seemed of no importance whatever.

"But—but you have not told me—" She stopped suddenly.

"What have I not told you?" he asked.

"You have not told me—" Then a new thought seemed to strike her, and she spoke with evident relief. "You have not told me which of the two soothsayers I am to engage."

"Engage them both," was his reply. "I am awfully sorry to leave you like this. You will convey my apologies to Sir William, won't you? But—but I must go."

A few minutes later he was out in the sunshine, and although he did not know why, he felt strangely free. It seemed to him that he had, in a marvelous way, escaped some calamity.

But what should he do? Where should he go? He had no engagement of any sort, and there wasn't the slightest reason why he should have left Templeton Court. All the same, he pressed the accelerator, and the perfect piece of mechanism which he drove flashed along the road like lightning...

He found himself nearing Baronstown. The roads, instead of being country lanes, were granite paved, and showed signs of the heavy lorries which had passed over them. In the near distance a host of mill chimneys revealed themselves.

Suddenly he stopped the car, and heaved a deep sigh as if of relief. He took off his hat, and swept his hand across his forehead. His brow was wet with great beads of perspiration.

*"The love of a lifetime! The love of a lump of clay!"*

The words rang in his ears, and they seemed weighted with meaning. Of course he remembered who spoke them. He remembered the occasion, too; but he did not feel angry now as he felt then.

Why?

A thought suddenly flashed through his mind. He scarcely knew the old Scotch minister at all, but he remembered what Peggy Edgecumbe had said about him. She had told him that her uncle, even when he was almost heart-broken at the loss of his wife, was happy beyond words in the thought that he would meet her again; that death to him was only a parting for a little while.

He compared this with his grandfather's attitude. Old Amos Lancaster was one of the richest men in Lancashire, yet his heart had shriveled up at the thought of death. Why the difference?

He woke as if from a trance. He had stopped his car by the roadside a few miles from Baronstown. Why in the world was he bothering about such things? and why had he not remained at Templeton Court? Evelyn Templeton's eyes had asked him to remain; so had her honeyed tones; so had her words; so had her lips. If ever—

He started from his seat, put the car into gear, released the brake, and pressed the accelerator.

Again he flew over the road as if it were necessary for him to reach the town quickly. Nevertheless, he had barely reached the outskirts of Baronstown before he again slowed down his car.

He had not seen Stephen Wallace for a long time. He remembered the last conversation they had had together, and called to mind what the young minister had told him about the invitation he had received from a distant city. He had meant to see him again soon after, but it had seemed as though the fates were against it. Important engagements had kept him from inviting Stephen Wallace to Barons Court, and then when he had become more free he had been told that the young minister had been called out of town because of some happening which he, Baxter Lancaster, was ignorant of.

He heard the town hall clock chiming, and looking, he could see the tower of the principal building of the town lifting its head above even the mill chimneys which were scattered thickly around.

He could see the face of the clock plainly. It was half-past six. Yes, there was just time for him to go and see Stephen Wallace.

Then he remembered he had been told only that morning that the young minister was still out of town. Therefore, it would be useless for him to call on him.

Then suddenly he realized the fact that the residence of the old Scotch minister, the Rev. Alexander McAlpine, was near by.

He did not at all know why he did it, but he found himself anxiously searching for the old minister's house, and ere long was pulling at his door bell.

A minute later he was shown into the presence of Peggy Edgecumbe. "Yes, my uncle is in," she replied in answer to his question. "Do you want to see him? I asked that because he is engaged just now."

"Will it be for long?" queried Baxter.

"Half an hour, I should say. Do you want to see him about anything important?"

"In a way it is," replied Baxter. "I've wanted a chat with him ever since you first told me about him."

"What did I tell you about him?" And the girl's eyes flashed strangely.

"You told me a lot," replied Baxter. "You told me what I have never been able to drive out of my mind."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Don't you remember?" he asked. "It was in the park at Barons Court when I had told you what seemed to make you angry. No, you needn't fear, I am not going to repeat my declaration."

He was almost startled by what he was saying. He remembered that an hour or so before he had been at Templeton Court, and that he had been under the spell of Evelyn Templeton's eyes. He had been strangely tempted, too; tempted to ask this proud girl to be his wife. But even when the temptation was at its strongest, the memory of what Peggy Edgecumbe had said to him had perhaps been the strongest factor in keeping him from declaring himself.

Yes he, Baxter Lancaster, had told this girl, Peggy Edgecumbe, only a few weeks before that he loved her. A feeling that he must do so had come upon him suddenly, and he had yielded to it almost without realizing what he was doing. But she had refused him; refused him almost with scorn. He had been angry at the time, too, because of what the girl had said to him. But he was angry no longer. Why it was he could not tell, but he was almost glad she had scorned his declaration.

“Miss Edgecumbe, I’m going to ask you an impertinent question, so please don’t answer it unless you feel inclined to, and please forgive me for again referring to the night when I angered you so. As I said just now, I am not going to offend again. But perhaps you will remember what you told me?”

Peggy Edgecumbe was silent.

“You told me,” went on Baxter, “that you could not think of me in the way I wanted to be thought of because you could not join your life to that of a man who was, like yourself, a blank materialist. That was so, wasn’t it?”

Still Peggy Edgecumbe was silent, but her lips quivered.

“It was then,” went on Baxter, “that you told me about your uncle. You asked me if I had ever heard him preach, and I told you that I never went to church. Are you still a blank materialist, Miss Edgecumbe?”

“Yes,” replied the girl.

“So am I,” replied Baxter, “but I wish I weren’t. That is the reason why I have come to see your uncle.”

The girl started to her feet, and came closer to Baxter. “You’ve asked me a question,” she said. “You asked me if I am still a materialist, and I’ve answered you. Now I want to ask you a question. Supposing I had answered you differently from what I did, would you be glad?”

Her words startled him, and he scarcely knew what to say.

“I mean it,” she went on. “There I—I think my uncle is at liberty now. Those men who came to see him are going, but I want you to answer me before I tell him that you are waiting to see him. You say you are still a materialist, Mr. Lancaster. You say you have no faith in anything beyond what you can see, and touch, and hear! That’s just where I am. My stepfather, of whom I told you, robbed me of all faith. Now then, supposing, knowing all the time that I was a materialist, I had said yes: should I have satisfied you P—No, do not be afraid to answer me, Mr. Lancaster. You say you have thought a great deal about what I said to you on the night in question? I have thought a great deal, too, and I am not in the humor for subterfuges. Would you, could you be satisfied with a wife whose horizon was limited to things seen? Tell me frankly—Ah I you are silent! Thank you for not trying to tell me a lie, Mr. Lancaster.”

At that moment Mr. McAlpine came into the room. Evidently the servant who had announced Baxter to Peggy Edgecumbe had also told the old minister that he had called. “Ah!” exclaimed Mr. McAlpine; “it is kind of

you to call. Do you know I became frightfully interested in you on your twenty-eighth birthday. I had scarcely ever thought of you before that, but the sight of you that afternoon made me think of you as a friend.”

“I am sorry I haven’t looked you up before,” was Baxter’s reply. “I scarcely saw you on my birthday,” he stammered.

“Ah, yes, but I saw you,” replied the old minister. “It was a wonderful day, wasn’t it? The sky, for Baronstown, was quite blue, and that old home of yours looked a perfect gem of architecture amongst the trees. Ah! they knew how to build in those old days, didn’t they?”

“They did indeed,” assented Baxter, wondering what the old minister was driving at.

“Did you have a happy birthday, Mr. Lancaster?” he went on.

“That’s a strange question, Mr. McAlpine.”

“Is it? I listened to your speech after your grandfather had spoken, and I tried to understand the look in your eyes. You will forgive me for speaking freely, won’t you?”

“I want you to speak freely,” replied the young man. “To tell you the truth, sir, I came here tonight for the purpose of having a chat with you, and I shall not be satisfied with anything less than plain speech. You asked me a question just now. You asked me if my birthday was a happy one. In a way, yes, and in a way, no.”

“In a way, no?” queried the old Scotsman. “I am sorry for that. Nothing happened to trouble you, I hope?”

It was evident that he meant what he said, and that he was not in the habit of uttering polite nothings. Up to a few years before there were but few Scotsmen living in Baronstown, but as their numbers grew they decided to build a Scotch church. This led to Mr. McAlpine receiving a call, and to his taking up his residence in a Lancashire town. He had altogether belied the people’s conception of what a Presbyterian minister ought to be. They had looked upon the Scots as argumentative, unemotional and strictly logical. Whereas Mr. McAlpine, although pure Gaelic, was emotional, and trusted more in intuition than in logical reasoning. Perhaps that was why not only Scotch people came to hear him, but the English as well.

Why, too, he, by some subtle process, led utter strangers to confide in him.

Baxter, on looking around the room, realized that he and the old minister were left together. “I wonder,” thought the young man, “why she has left us,

and whether she has told her uncle about my declaration?"

"Is there anything the matter, Mr. Lancaster?" asked the Scotsman. "Forgive my being so abrupt, but I asked you because of two things. First, I remember what you said just now about speaking freely, and, second, there is a look in your eyes which I do not like."

"I beg your pardon!" said Baxter, looking at the other.

"Please don't be offended," asserted the older man, "but I am afraid I do not think sufficiently before speaking. But, you see, I came of Highland parents, and Highlanders are said to be both superstitious and emotional."

To be absolutely frank with you, Mr. McAlpine," and Baxter felt a little excited as he looked at the old minister, "I've been bothered a good deal since the first of June."

"I am sorry for that! How, and in what way?"

"Because of its ending," replied Lancaster.

"And what was its ending?"

"Did you know Mrs. Ned Stuttard? No, I don't suppose you would; but she died that night. Mr. Stephen Wallace, of the St. George's Independent Church, had dropped in to Barons Court for a chat, and while he was there a message came to him that he was wanted at Mr. Ned Stuttard's house. When he arrived there she was dead."

He repeated the words as a boy might repeat a lesson, while the old minister listened attentively.

"I went with Wallace to the house," went on Lancaster, "and saw Ned Stuttard. I thought he was going raving mad, and that started all sorts of questions in my mind."

"What questions?"

Baxter had had no intention of telling Mr. McAlpine about these things, but it seemed to him that the old man compelled him to speak. "Oh, the whole range of questions connected with death," he replied. "Was death the end, and the end all? Was there any possibility of knowing whether there was life after death? What was the use of being born when life was so short? These and a hundred other things came to me."

Mr. McAlpine nodded. He seemed to be reading the younger man's mind, and to be noting the fact that the words were correctly recording what the mind was thinking. "Well, and what conclusion did you come to?" The old minister had a distinct Scotch accent, which struck Baxter " as being pleasant to listen to.



“I am afraid,” he replied, “that my thoughts were not very cheering.”

“In what way?”

“I didn’t believe that there was anything after death. I don’t now. To me there is no reason for believing, or for hoping that there is any continuance of life.”

“And that’s what’s troubling you?” queried the old minister.

“I expect,” replied Lancaster, and his thoughts seemed far away, “it was because of the change which had come over everything.”

“What change?”

“Well, you see, the earlier part of the day had been devoted to music, and song, and merry-making. You said just now that you heard my grandfather’s speech. If you did, you will know that all his thoughts and hopes were about me. Nearly every one tried to be looking forward to things pleasant, bright and joyous. Then, even before midnight came, I went to Ned Stuttard’s house only to find despair and death. It all seemed such an awful mockery!”

“Why have you come to me?” The old Scotsman spoke sharply and abruptly, and but for the kindly gleam in his eyes, one might have imagined that he resented Baxter Lancaster’s presence.

“I was told that you had no doubt about the future,” replied Lancaster. “That you had a faith, or a consciousness, or whatever you like to call it, which rose triumphant over such things, and that in spite of the misery of the world, you were supremely happy. I wanted to learn your secret.”

“Each one of us has to learn that truth for himself,” replied the old minister.

“Yes, but how can you learn it?”

“Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.” Mr. McAlpine spoke quietly, but the words were evidently full of meaning to him.

“Forgive me for bothering you,” cried Baxter, “but that kind of thing doesn’t cut much ice!”

“What doesn’t cut much ice?”

“Repeating passages of Scripture. It is believed that what you have just repeated was written by a man called Paul eighteen hundred years or more ago; but that doesn’t seem to have anything to do with the life of today! Let me put my case plainly, Mr. McAlpine, and I imagine I, in the broad sense of the term, am typical of hundreds. In any case, please bear with me. I am, as you perhaps know, descended from several generations of so-called Christian people. I was brought up to accept Christian beliefs without much

question. My grandfather, who is largely responsible for my upbringing, is associated with the Wesleyan Methodists. In the main I have good health, and have, throughout the whole of my life, been comfortably situated. As you know, I am regarded as one of the most fortunate young men in Lancashire. I have had a fair education, and I have at present more money than I know what to do with. On the whole, I have lived a fairly straight life. I don't take any credit for this, simply because I have not been tempted to do otherwise. My whole nature revolts against the coarse and the sensual, but that, fundamentally, is nothing to my credit. Have I made myself plain so far?"

"Perfectly," replied Mr. McAlpine with a smile.

"But here is my difficulty," went on Baxter. "In spite of all this, life seems to me to be a horrible mockery. As far as I can see, we are the sport of chance, and there is no clear plan or purpose in any of our lives. Take the people of Baronstown, for example. More than half of the inhabitants live from hand to mouth. To the great bulk of the people life is a continuous struggle for existence. Then, after a few years of toil and care and anxiety, the end comes. What's the use of it all?"

"Do you want a continuance of life?" asked the old minister.

"In a way, I do. Both my mind and something which is deeper and greater than my mind simply revolts against the idea of being born into the world, with all its hopes and longings and desires, and then to die at the end of a few years without any chance of those hopes being fulfilled, or its questions answered. Take Ned Stuttard, for example. His life was bound up in that of his wife. He loved her tenderly and completely; his every thought and hope were for her. Now she is dead! She died on the night, of June 1st, my birthday. While I was supposed to be, rejoicing in the festivities of that day, he was plunged into the blackest hell. I saw him, and as I looked into his eyes I was afraid. He had lost what was dearest to him in life, and he had no hope of ever seeing her again. And that is the picture of millions!"

"Go on," said the old minister.

"Go on!" repeated Baxter. "It seems to me that I have come to the end."

"Did you not have a chat with Mr. Ned Stuttard? Were you not invited to be a bearer at the funeral? Did you not go to the church both on the day of the funeral and on the Sunday following?"

"Who told you?" asked Baxter.

"That doesn't matter. Isn't it true?"

“And if it is? I am afraid I do not understand.”

“Have you told me all, Mr. Lancaster?”

“To tell you more would be simply to repeat the same thing in other words. I could give you half a dozen instances illustrating the same truth. Take the case of my grandfather, for example. He is eighty years of age; his name is a synonym for generosity to this town. He is the biggest employer of labor for miles around, and he is regarded as an upright man. As I said, he is eighty years of age, and he will soon be called upon to die. What’s the good of his living? In his young manhood he married a beautiful woman, and he loved her tenderly. Then when my father was born she died, leaving my grandfather alone.”

“And has he any hopes of ever seeing her again?”

“That’s the mockery of it! He has no hopes of ever seeing her again!”

“Why?”

“How do I know why?” queried Baxter.

“Had he no hopes at the time your grandmother died?” He waited a few seconds, and then went on: “Ah! you are silent, and I do not wonder at your silence. You said when you came, Mr. Lancaster, that you hoped I would speak plainly. You will not be offended if I take you at your word, will you?”

“No, go ahead,” replied Lancaster. “Speak as plainly as you like.”

“Then I will,” said Mr. McAlpine.

# 17. The Victory Of Life

IN A SENSE, the situation was commonplace. To the casual observer, Baxter Lancaster, a rich young Lancashireman, had called on an old Presbyterian divine, and they were led to discuss subjects which, to a vast portion of the population, were dull and uninteresting.

And yet, in another sense, the position was vitally interesting. For that matter, it was almost tragic. It was all the more tragic because, in a very deep sense, Baxter Lancaster typified the life of millions.

He was an incarnate yawn, and that yawn suggested weariness, unsatisfaction, hopelessness, and, as a consequence, unhappiness.

Not that he would be regarded by the great mass of people with whom he lived, and who knew him well, as, an unhappy man. For that matter, most people would have said that he was one of the most fortunate young fellows in the British Isles. He had good health, refined associations, and might, if he would, marry a beautiful woman who was the daughter of one of the most exclusive families in Lancashire. What more could he want?

And yet Baxter Lancaster was an incarnate yawn.

Life, in spite of everything, did not satisfy him, because it seemed so little, so incomplete.

“Give me health and a day,” said Emerson, the American philosopher, “and I will make the pomp of kings ridiculous.”

That statement is often quoted, but does it suggest truth, except in a very superficial way? A man may have both and yet life may be a tragedy.

“I’ll tell you what’s the matter with you,” said Mr. McAlpine. “You are nearly dead. You have been committing a slow suicide throughout your life, and now your work is nearly done.”

“Thank you,” replied Baxter a little sarcastically; “that helps a great deal.”

“No, no, don’t be offended! You have come to me about an important matter, and I want to get at the truth. Twenty-eight years ago, on the first of June, Almighty God sent a baby into the world. His parents had him

christened Baxter, and as his people had been called Lancaster, he went by the name of Baxter Lancaster. When Almighty God sent that child into the world He meant that child to be happy; He made it possible for him to be happy.”

“In what way?” asked Baxter.

“The secret of happiness,” replied the minister, “is Life, and the more Life you have the happier you are. That is true whether it is physical, intellectual or spiritual. Have you got that?”

“I’ll try to bear it in mind,” replied Baxter. “But good heavens, Mr. McAlpine, remember that I am not a baby; I am a full-grown man, and I want to be treated as such!”

“That is what I want to bear in mind,” replied the minister with a laugh. “Do you know what’s the matter with you, Mr. Lancaster? The great thing that you need is religion—Christ.”

Baxter smiled contemptuously. “Heaven save me; from that!” he said.

“The great thing that Jesus Christ came to bring to the world, and the greatest thing God Himself could give to the world,” went on the minister, “was Life. Do you accept that?”

Baxter was silent.

“I’ll put it in another way, then. The secret of happiness is Life. Youth is generally happy because it has abundant life, and whichever way you regard it, an abundance of life, whether it is physical, mental or spiritual, is, in the particular realm in which this abundance of life appertains, supreme happiness. It is your sick, bilious man, the man whose blood is sluggish, whose body is poisoned with all kinds of diseases, who is a miserable man physically. Let him have health and life, and he is generally happy. That’s true in every direction, in every realm. Abundant health, abundant life, means happiness. I said just now that your great need was religion—Christ. Get down to the great heart truth of Christ, and what is Christianity? What did He say Himself? ‘I am come that they might have Life, and that they might have it more abundantly.’ Get hold of that, man! Think of it in its deepest and most vital senses, and you have got hold of the greatest truth in the world! And more than that, do you know one of the most tragic plaints that Christ ever made? It was this: ‘And ye would not come unto Me that ye might have Life.’ That’s where your trouble is, Mr. Lancaster.” Lancaster was silent. Of what he was thinking I do not pretend to say. “Take the cases you have quoted to me this evening,” went on the old minister. “Take the

case of Ned Stuttard. He had lost his wife, and he was sunk in despair as a consequence. Why was he sunk in despair? Take the case of your grandfather. He told you that at the time your grandmother died he felt he would meet her again; he felt certain that she was not dead; but as the years passed by, that certainty left him. Do you see where that leads you?"

"No, I don't," replied Lancaster. "Then let me make it plain to you," urged the older man. "We will begin with Ned Stuttard first of all. He had been married to his wife for long years, and during that time, as you say, he loved her with a great love; but his deeper nature he allowed to die. To him the great business of life was money-making, getting on in business, amassing wealth. And he succeeded. But what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

"Please, please! Mr. McAlpine!" protested Lancaster. "You are using unprovable terms! What is the soul that you speak so glibly about?"

"Use another term, then. What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his sense of God? It was because he lost his sense of God that he couldn't realize that his wife was alive. It was because your grandfather had lost this through his long years of money-making that he had lost his certainty of your grandmother's continued existence. The spiritual life, within him had become atrophied!"

Baxter looked up startled. He remembered what Stephen Wallace had said on the day after Eliza Stuttard's funeral; remembered, too, how angry his grandfather had been, and how afterwards he had confessed to the truth of the young minister's words. He had said nothing to him about it since. Somehow, he could not tell why, but it seemed too painful. But now that Mr. McAlpine had repeated the same words, everything came back to him. He saw his grandfather seated by his side in the church; watched the look in his eyes; noted his tremulous lips, and felt the heart-hunger from which he was suffering.

"You asked me to speak plainly," went on Mr. McAlpine. "I will. You, according to the standards of the world, ought to be one of the happiest men alive. You, on your own confession, are blessed with good health, a fine old home, congenial associations, and a huge fortune. And yet you find life tame and uninteresting! Why? It is because what I told you just now is true. You are nearly dead. You have been committing slow suicide of what is highest and best in you. The secret of happiness is the Life of God welling

up in men's lives, and you have been killing that life by starving it, by disuse."

Baxter seemed on the point of speaking. Evidently he disagreed with what the old minister was saying, and was trying to find words whereby he could refute him. But Mr. McAlpine would have none of it.

"No," he said, "I will not argue with you. At least, not now. When you have had time to think over what I have said, come to me again, and we will talk further. Meanwhile, I am sure of what I have said. Not only you, but millions of others, are committing the crime of crimes. You are killing the greatest gift that God Himself can make to man—the gift of Life! You are starving your soul—the most precious thing in heaven or earth! Your grandfather has for years been starving his soul. That is why he has grown uncertain about his wife; why he no longer feels sure that she is waiting for him; his spiritual nature has become atrophied—atrophied! It's a ghastly word, but it conveys a terrible truth! The same thing is true about that man Ned Stuttard. On the night his wife died he went nearly mad. Why? He thought he had lost her for ever. She seemed gone from him for ever, and he could hardly bear the thought. It's the same tragedy, the same curse against which our Lord warned the world when He walked the dusty highways of men. 'What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'"

"Look here," said Baxter, after a long silence, "and you must please excuse me if I speak of intimate things; but it is only a year or so since your wife, Mrs. McAlpine, died. Of course I do not pretend to know anything of your home life, but, according to the talk of the town, your relations with Mrs. McAlpine were almost perfect, and that you loved each other with a perfect love."

The old minister was silent.

"Well, she is gone from you. Do you believe you will ever meet her again?"

"I don't believe anything about it," replied the old minister. "I know I shall."

"How do you know? Excuse me for asking such a direct question, but it is vital to me."

"That I can't tell you," replied the old man. "How do I know that a flower is beautiful? How do I know when I see the western sky lit up with the radiance of the setting sun, that I have seen something grand? I can't

explain it; I only know that it is so. You asked me to" speak plainly, and I will be as frank as I can. It is seldom that I speak about such things; they are too sacred to discuss lightly. But I want to help you. God only knows how I miss my wife—and yet, mark you, I am not lonely. Sometimes I feel her presence with me, and I am sure that all is well with her."

"How are you sure? I don't understand."

"Neither do I," replied Mr. McAlpine with a smile. "It is something too great to understand. I do not understand how I am sure of God, or of His Christ; but I know I am. I am sure of Him just as I am sure of sunlight, sure of the wonder of the summer weather, and a thousand other things. I can't explain them, but I am conscious of them."

"But you must feel old age coming on you," protested Lancaster. "You must feel the weaknesses of life, and"you must know, too, that life is a huge, ghastly tragedy!"

"Yes, I do know it. But what then? Of course, being , human, I have human pains and sufferings. Being human, too, I am afraid I am sometimes querulous and irritable. But all the time, because I know that God lives and that He never makes a mistake, there is a great, deep, calm joy which these things never touch. As for your statement that life is a great ghastly tragedy, I think I understand you. And I'll tell you this, young man. If I weren't sure of God, if I weren't sure that because He lives light will come out of darkness and peace will come out of storm, I should go mad! Do you think I don't feel the tragedy of life? God help me, but I do! But I feel more than the tragedy. I am conscious that behind misery, behind pain, behind death—ay, and behind Hell itself—are Eternal Life and Eternal Love, and because of this Eternal Life and Eternal Love, Hell itself shall vanish in the triumph of God!"

Baxter looked at the old minister's face, and as he looked he felt that the questions he wanted to ask were paltry and trifling. That triumphant joy which shone from the old man's eyes, and the consciousness which was something beyond human words to explain, kept him from speaking further. He only knew that this old divine had entered realms of infinite joy to which he, Baxter Lancaster, was a stranger; and that although his mind was still unsatisfied, something greater than his mind rose up within him, and declared that this old saint had learnt the secret of secrets.

"But not another word now," laughed Mr. McAlpine. "I hear Peggy's footsteps in the hall outside. You know Peggy, don't you P—But of course



you do!”

At that moment Peggy Edgecumbe entered the room, and it was easy to see by the look with which her uncle regarded her that he had a great love for her. “My dear,” he laughed, “do you know Mr. Lancaster has been here more than an hour, and if I remember anything about the feelings of a young man, he is as hungry as a hunter. Have you got anything in the way of food for us, my dear? For, of course, Mr. Lancaster will stay to dinner.”

“Really,” protested Baxter, “I couldn’t think—”

“I don’t care what you think,” laughed the old man, “but I am not going to allow you to leave the house hungry. It is true you will find everything very simple, for the clergy, whether Scotch or English, can’t afford extravagance. But you will have a hearty welcome to our evening meal. Besides, I want to introduce you to my younger sister. She has been good enough to come and keep me company since my wife went to heaven.”

A few minutes later Baxter found himself sitting by the side of Mr. McAlpine’s sister. She was a sad-eyed looking lady of about fifty years of age.

Baxter found himself looking at her curiously. This was the lady who, after Peggy Edgecumbe’s father had died, was married for the second time to a Fellow of Trinity, Cambridge, and who, as Professor Lambert, was regarded as an authority in the scholastic world. “At all events,” thought Baxter, “these people who believe in God seem a jolly sight happier than those of us who don’t.”

When, soon after dinner, he left the Scotch Manse, which was the name the Baronstown people had given to Mr. McAlpine’s residence, midsummer as it was, the light was beginning to fade.

“No, no,” protested the old man, when Baxter apologized for taking advantage-of his kindness. “It’s been a real joy to see you, my lad, and when you come again I hope you will have good news to tell me.”

As Baxter passed through Baronstown and ran his car up the hill towards his home, he realized that earlier .. in the day he had been at Templeton Court. He called to mind, too, his experiences at the home of Evelyn Templeton.

The poles seemed to lie between the Scotch Manse and the proud dwelling-place of the baronet. The Scotch Manse was a villa situated in a by no means attractive, street; while Templeton Court stood on an eminence commanding a view of a large tract of the surrounding I country. The

Scotch Manse was, in many senses, humble and poor; which the other had centuries of history behind it — history which was bound up with the monarchs of - ' a great country. And yet Baxter could not help feeling that it was in the humble dwelling-place that the secret of life dwelt. What, after all, were name and lineage?

What satisfaction did they give when one was faced with the questions of life and death?

Baxter found himself quoting some lines from Tennyson:

“Howe'er it be it seems to me,  
'Tis only noble to be good;  
Kind hearts are more than coronets,  
And simple faith than Norman blood.”

Of course, the words were terribly hackneyed. Nevertheless, they conveyed a great truth.

Then something else came to him. He recalled What the old minister had said to him, and he found himself quoting some other lines from Tennyson:

“If e'er when faith had fallen asleep,  
I heard a voice 'Believe no more,'  
And heard an ever-breaking shore  
Which tumbled on a godless deep;  
A warmth within the heart would melt  
The freezing reason's colder part,  
And like a man in wrath the heart stood up,  
And answered 'I have felt.'”

He knew he hadn't quoted it correctly, but he had got hold of the sense of it, and it conveyed an eternal truth.

When he reached Barons Court it was past ten o'clock, but he found that his grandfather was not only up, but that he had company.

“Where 'ast 'a been, lad?” queried old Amos as he entered the room.

“Oh, lots of places,” he evaded. “I'd have come home sooner if I knew you had company.”

“Ay, we've bin all right, haven't us, Ned?” and he turned to his visitor. “As tha see'st,” he went on, “Ned Stuttard came up an hour or two ago for a chat. Ay, and he's done me good, too; he has for sure!”

Baxter, who had been looking anxiously at his grandfather, noted the bright look in the old man's eyes. Then, turning, he gazed for the second time into his visitor's face. When last he had spoken to Ned Stuttard it was the Sunday after his wife's funeral. He had gone home with him after the morning's service, and had stayed to lunch. He remembered it as one of the most miserable hours he had ever spent. There was grim agony in Ned Stuttard's eyes; a suggestion of despair in his face. But now, for some reason or another, there was a difference. There was a light shining from the Lancashireman's eyes which suggested hope. Nay, it suggested more than hope; it told of something for which the young man could find no word.

"What have you been talking about?" he asked the two older men, and, to his surprise, both were silent. Nevertheless, they exchanged glances; glances which suggested something important.

"I mun be going now," said Ned Stuttard, throwing his cigar end in the fire-place, and rising to his feet. "It will be past eleven before I get home."

"Did you walk, or did you come in your car?" asked Baxter.

"Ay, I walked," replied Ned Stuttard. "I am glad I did, too; it did me good. It was a fine night, and the walk through the park was lovely."

"Come again soon," and Amos spoke aloud. "It's been good to have a chat with you, Ned."

"Ay, I'll be noan so long," replied the other.

At that moment the man Chadwick came into the room in answer to Baxter's ring.

"I'll come to your room before you go to sleep," said the young man to his grandfather. "Meanwhile I am going to run Mr. Stuttard down to his house."

"You'll do nowt o't sort," and the old manufacturer spoke in broad Lancashire. "But I'll be glad if you will walk a bit of the way with me."

"Ay, go with him," cried old Amos. "'Appen he will tell you a bit of What he told me. Good night, Ned lad!"

A few minutes later Baxter was walking by Ned Stuttard's side towards the park gates. "What have you and ' grandfather been talking about?" asked the young man.

"Why do you ask?"

"'Because you look better—happier."

"Well, I am. Look here, Baxter lad, I've something I want to say to you. You are a friend of Stephen Wallace, aren't you?"

“We have become friendly since the first of June,” replied Baxter.

“Ay, and it was on the first of June that God took Eliza from me, wasn’t it?”

Baxter was silent.

“Ay, lad,” and the old Lancashireman stopped in the drive. “I shall never forget that night—never, never, never! I thought hell had swallowed me up I’ve heard since that it was the talk of the town how Eliza and I loved each other. But I never knew what she had been to me until that night, and when I knew that she was gone!— O God! O God! O God!— But I’ll not talk about that now; and yet, in a way, I must. You noticed tonight that I was different? Well, I am different. It’s not something that I can talk about to everybody. In fact, there are only two or three people in the world to whom I can speak of it. You remember the day I came home from the funeral, and you remember the next day when we came home from church?— Good God, what a horrible time it was, wasn’t it? And yet, in a way, it was grand!”

He took off his hat as he spoke and looked around him. The trees in the park were in their full summer foliage; while the twittering of the birds, even although it had now become dark, suggested the joyousness of the night. Looking, Baxter saw a growing moon shining through the leafy branches; while the wind, blowing as it did from the moors, was as sweet as the nectar of the gods.

“I’ve learnt summat,” almost shouted Ned Stuttard presently.

“What have you learnt?” asked Baxter.

“That behind you moon God is; that behind misery, pain, death; behind everything, God is! Ay, I have learnt it, and I have fair got hold of it, too!”

The old man spoke like a man in wrath, and yet there was a suggestion of triumph in his tones.

“You said just now that you and Stephen Wallace had become friends,” he went on. “Ay, Stephen’s a grand lad!”

“He is a grand lad,” Baxter assented.

“What I’d have done without him, I don’t know. I was nigh mad that night when Eliza died; but Stephen saved me. I’ve noan got where he’s got, even yet; but I am trying to get there! Do you remember what I said when we were coming home from church on the day’ after my wife was buried? It is not often that I say anything worth repeating, but I did that morning. It

was this: ' Although I am dead, I can find Life through Him Who declared He was Eternal Life.' Do you remember that?"

"Yes, I remember that," replied Baxter.

The two men walked on together again side by side until they neared the park gates. Then Ned Stuttard stopped again suddenly. "Funny, isn't it?" he said.

"What's funny?"

"Why, think," exclaimed the old Lancashireman, "it's nearly two thousand years ago since Jesus lived, and was crucified in that little country away East there! I've 'eerd as how people like yourself, who are too clever for this world, say that He never lived at all. But what I want you to explain is this, Baxter Lancaster. He told people that they could find Eternal Life through Him. And you can! I am finding it! And what I want to know is this: if He is dead, or if He had never lived, how can what I have found, even up to now, be explained?"

There was such a strange intonation in the old man's voice that Baxter stood and looked at him in astonishment. It did not seem like Ned Stuttard speaking at all. "Are you sure of what you say, Ned?" he asked.

"Do you think I would talk about such a thing, in such a way, if I weren't sure? By gum, and I am sure, and it's makin' all the difference to me!"

He walked on a few yards again towards the park gates as if he was unconscious of Baxter's presence. Then, as if overcome by some great emotion, he drew a deep, sobbing breath. "Look here, Baxter," he said, "you;' remember what Stephen Wallace said to me on the night God took my missus home, don't you? I asked him if he was sure of what he was saying, or if it was only bunkum. And when he said he was sure, I just looked into his eyes, for I felt that if he were deceiving me I would murder him. But he wasn't deceiving me! I knew he had got hold of something, some great secret which made all the difference. And I said to myself: ' I'll find it, too! ' And I am getting it! I am, Baxter lad! I am getting it! But there! I don't want you to go any farther now. Good night," and having reached the park gates, Ned Stuttard walked towards his house, while Baxter stood watching him.

## 18. Edgar Butterworth Declares Himself

“I WONDER NOW, I WONDER!” said Baxter Lancaster to himself when at length Ned Stuttard’s massive form disappeared from his view.

Yes, the old manufacturer had changed. His eyes were different; the whole appearance of his face was different; his outlook was different; he was no longer almost mad with despair. He might have had a vision.

Baxter slowly made his way to Barons Court. Yes, the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places. The old house, which was plainly to be seen in the light of the moon through the trees, formed a picture of beauty. It had stood there for centuries, and would probably stand centuries more. Even Templeton Court, the home of the Templetons, was not more inviting. Certainly it was larger, and more imposing; but it was not so homelike. He wondered what Evelyn Templeton would say if she knew what he had been doing since he left her a few hours before.

It had been a strange afternoon. Indeed, the whole day had seemed laden with destiny. Nothing much had happened, and yet a great deal had happened. He called to mind the smile with which Evelyn had greeted him; remembered, too, his experiences with the Egyptian fortune-teller. He wondered what was in Evelyn’s mind, and why she should want him to make a choice for her that day.

He did not know why it was, but he felt as though he had escaped something tremendous. He had been on the point of declaring himself, and of asking the proud beauty to marry him. He did not know at all why he should have done it, for his heart would not have gone with his words. Why, then, should he have contemplated such a thing? He must have been mad...

Still, he had refrained, and he was still free. He wondered if he would always be able to resist the seductions of this proud beauty. After all, she was greatly to be desired, and if he married her his position would be assured. He would no longer be merely Baxter Lancaster, a wealthy

manufacturer, but Baxter Lancaster who had taken Evelyn Templeton to wife, and who, thereby, was associated with the so-called nobility of the land.

But, Good God! what was it worth?

He remembered the deep breath of relief he had drawn when at length he had passed through the park gates on his way to Baronstown that afternoon. Had he acted wisely? Had he been untrue to any code of honor? Anyhow, he was glad he was still free.

His thoughts became transferred from Evelyn Templeton to Peggy Edgecumbe. What a feather-pated fellow he had been! If the latter had answered him differently on the day of the fête he would no longer be thinking about Sir William Templeton's daughter. All his interests, and all his hopes would be centered on Peggy Edgecumbe. But she had refused him. In a way, she had despised him. Anyhow, she had been very definite in her decision not to accept him.

On the whole, too, he was glad. He had yielded to the impulse of the moment in speaking to her. His grandfather had urged him to seek Evelyn Templeton's hand, and his heart had revolted at the idea. Was not that why he had turned to Peggy Edgecumbe?

He tried to read his own heart; tried to understand his own feelings, and he was ashamed of himself for his fickleness. For that matter, there seemed nothing stable in life; nothing worth living for.

And yet had he not been mistaken? Had not that old Scotch divine found the secret of life? Was not Ned Stuttard finding it?

He remembered his promise to go into his grandfather's bedroom, and bid him good night. This had become a habit with him during the last few weeks, and the old man would have felt himself neglected if he failed in his duty.

But why was there a light in the snuggerly? He remembered going into the room before accompanying Ned Stuttard; remembered, too, that he had switched off the electric light. Why, then, was the room alight now?

Opening the door, he entered. "Hallo, Butterworth!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

Edgar Butterworth rose at Baxter's entrance, and appeared to be uncomfortable. "I—I wanted to see you; I wanted a talk with you about an important matter."

"About business?"

“Yes, in a way.”

“Then surely you could have waited until tomorrow, until business hours! I haven’t missed being in my office of a morning for several weeks.”

“I wanted to discuss something with you that I didn’t feel like talking about in Lancasters,” Edgar said a little sullenly.

Baxter looked at Edgar Butterworth for a few seconds without speaking. Evidently he was puzzled. “Of course, I don’t know what you have in your mind,” he said, “but I’ll be down in a minute. I’m going to speak to grandfather now.”

Rushing upstairs he found ’old Amos Lancaster still awake, and evidently awaiting his grandson’s return. “You seemed surprised at finding Ned Stuttard here,” the old man said as he entered the room.

“I was a bit.”

“We’ve seen a goodish deal of each other lately,” old Amos explained. “He’s not so old as I am. Indeed, he seems like a boy to me. All the same, he knew your grandmother.”

“Yes?” queried Baxter, and waited for the old man to say more.

“He’s got hold of something grand!” cried the old man. “See, I’ve been reading the Gospel according to St. John, and it’s wonderful! Wonderful! Good night, ’Baxter lad. I’m glad you’ve come up to see me. By the way, Edgar Butterworth is downstairs waiting for you.”

“Yes, I saw him,” replied Baxter. “Do you know what he’s come for?”

“Nay, I don’t. He came almost the very minute you had left. The lad looks fearful about something, and I was wondering if he’s been doing something he oughtn’t to do, and got into trouble about money. But I didn’t bother to ask him. Ay, Baxter lad, I’m right glad I’ve got a grandson like you who has taken over things.”

Baxter found his way back to the snugery where Edgar Butterworth awaited him. He was evidently anxious to talk with him privately, for the moment Baxter entered he looked around the room nervously, and then asked if he might close the door.

“Certainly you may close the door,” was Baxter’s reply. “But what’s the matter? And why have you come here tonight? I may as well tell you that I don’t care about talking business out of business hours.”

Edgar Butterworth’s face was a curious study at that moment. On the one hand, it was evident that he was anxious, and not a little afraid. On the other, he was apparently determined to take advantage of his relationship



with the owner of the house. "It isn't as though we were strangers," he managed to blurt out presently.

"No, we are not strangers," Baxter answered. "But why do you recall that fact?"

"Of course, you know what's happened at the factory?" Edgar asserted after a somewhat awkward silence.

"Happened at the factory?" queried Baxter.

"Yes," and Edgar drew himself up in his chair as though he was fully determined to be taken at his full value. "I tried to come up earlier," he asserted, "but some fellows down in the town got hold of me, and kept me longer than I expected. I wanted your grandfather to be present at this interview, but when I came he was on the point of going to bed. As he told me, too, he was tired. Anyhow, I thought it better to wait for you, and have a clear understanding with you."

"Yes? What about?"

"About my position in the firm."

"About your position in the firm?"

"Yes, about my position in the firm. Baxter, I don't think you have treated me fairly. It's true there was never any agreement between us, but I've expected all along, and so has my mother, that I should be treated like one of the family, instead of which you have given me no more consideration than if I were an office boy."

"Would you kindly explain yourself?"

"Well, then, it is as well to be absolutely frank. I expected, as a member of the family, to be given some shares in Lancasters, and a permanent position in the firm."

"Why? Was a promise given to you to that effect?"

"I don't say there was, but my mother always called your grandmother 'aunt,' and—"

"Oh, I don't doubt that there was some relationship between them," interrupted Baxter. "For that matter, I dare say there are a good many others in the town who can also claim a distant relationship to the family. But I may as well tell you, as I think I explained to you some time ago, that such considerations as those don't count with us today in the slightest degree."

"Yes, but Baxter," and Edgar insisted upon calling him by his Christian name, "I have thought a good deal about things generally since that little flare up we had."

“What little flare up?”

“It’s no use talking like that; you remember well enough! You called me over the coals because you thought I was too friendly with my secretary, and you not only removed her, but you have practically taken away my job from me. Now, as between man and man, I don’t call that straight, do you?”

“Don’t call what straight?”

“I’ve come here tonight to tell you about everything,” persisted Edgar, “and I think you will see before I’ve finished that I have reason on my side. Whatever else I am, I am a relation to the family; and your grandfather told my mother when he gave me a job in the business that he did it because my mother was in a way related to your grandmother. It’s true he put me in a subordinate position, but I quickly proved my worth, and then when my mother appealed to him, he placed me in charge of the South African department.”

Baxter nodded. “Go on,” he said, when Edgar seemed to hesitate as to what to say next.

“It’s difficult to go on,” asserted Edgar, “and presently I think you will see it as plainly as I do. As you know, through you I am no longer head of the South African department.”

“And why?” asked Baxter.

“Why? Well, I seemed to have offended you. You appeared to have turned rusty at something my late secretary told you, and— But there! I shall have something more to tell you about that in a minute.”

Baxter did not speak at this, but kept his eyes fixed upon the younger man. Indeed, so closely did he look at him that Edgar felt his courage oozing away. He had, before coming there that night, been drinking freely, and the Dutch courage which had sustained him during the first part of their interview was fast ebbing away.

“I had to have the South African department overhauled,” Baxter informed him. “As you know, it is only within the last few weeks that I have taken what is practically a complete control of the business, but I have, from time to time, had reason to think that the South African end of our affairs was not only loosely handled, but mishandled. I found this to be so. The department is only small, but it could become important. Instead of which, however, it’s not only failed to grow, but we have lost a good deal of money there. I determined, therefore, to put it in abler hands.”

“Was that the only reason why you turned me down?” asked Edgar.

“The only reason why I turned you down! I don’t understand.”

“Yes, you do. It’s no use making any bones about it, Baxter! Directly you were told that I was a bit too sweet on Miss Townley, and—and that sort of thing, you have taken against me, and now I have to content myself with a clerk’s position, where I used to be boss. But that’s not all. I want you to know that I am a man of honor, and that instead of thinking lightly about Miss Townley, I have decided to marry her. I am very fond of her, in fact.”

For several seconds there was a silence in the room. Whether it was the expression on Edgar’s face, or whether thoughts were called up not only by the words he had spoken, but by the tremulousness of his voice, Baxter seemed more than ordinarily impressed. Looking more closely still at his *soi-disant* cousin, he said quietly: “You say you intend to marry Miss Townley?”

“Yes, I do,” asserted Edgar.

“May I ask if you have declared yourself?”

“Declared myself!” repeated Edgar. “You don’t seem to understand the situation! Miss Townley was my secretary at a salary. I don’t say it was a liberal salary, but it was the best I could get for her, because I wanted to be on good terms with her. Anyway, she knows who I am, and if a typist such as she is, has a proposal from a member of the firm, she is not likely to turn him down, is she?”

“Then you haven’t spoken to her?” asked Baxter quickly.

“Of course I haven’t. But I mean to speak to her on the very day my position is assured. That’s why I have come to you, Baxter; and why I want a clear understanding. Let me be able to go to her not only as a chap who is sweet on her, but as one who has good prospects under the firm, and she will jump at me.”

“Isn’t that rather questionable?” asked Baxter.

“Questionable! How? What do you mean?”

“Because, for one thing, haven’t you insulted her?”

“I insult her when I want to marry her! How can you say that?”

“The reason why I had her moved was because of the stories you had circulated about her. I have scarcely spoken to the young lady myself, but from what I saw of her, she struck me as one who would resent anything which reflected on her honor, and it seemed to me—”

“But, look here, Baxter, I want to atone for all that. As I told you, I mean to marry her. I’m nuts on her, downright nuts! According to my way of thinking, she is the grandest girl in Baronstown, or in the whole of Lancashire for that matter; and I want to undo any harm I have done her by marrying her. But I can’t do it without a proper position to offer her. There now, that’s straight! Look here, Baxter, I’ll admit I was a bit huffy, I couldn’t help it, and I am sorry for it now, and I’ll work like a galley-slave in whatever position you put me. You shan’t regret trusting me! I’ll promise you that! And with her as my wife—”

“You are sure she would have you?” Baxter repeated.

“Is she likely to refuse me?” asked Edgar confidently. “Is a typist likely to say no to a man in the position I hope to be?”

By this time Baxter had had time to reflect. He remembered how on returning from the club on the previous night he had met her rushing along the street like one demented. He had also heard the sob which sounded like anguish which had escaped from her. He had not paid much attention to it at the time, but the meaning had come to him with tremendous force when he had received Nehemiah Blackburn’s message that afternoon, and he wondered if Edgar was cognizant of the truth. “Have you seen Miss Townley today?” he asked.

“No. She hasn’t been at the office, but I know the reason for it.”

“What reason?”

“Her mother has been very ill,” replied Edgar. “However, from what I hear, she is out of danger now. But that doesn’t matter.”

“What’s the matter with Miss Townley’s mother?” asked Baxter.

“I am told it’s heart trouble. Somebody was telling me that she might pop off at any moment. That’s all the more reason why her daughter should be settled before she goes.”

“I never heard of it before,” remarked Baxter.

“No, you wouldn’t. Ruth isn’t one to complain. She never told me about it, even when she was my secretary: but I found out.”

“Then she has never taken you into her confidence?”

“No, not as you may say confidence. You see, I was rather mistaken in her.”

“Mistaken in her?”

“Yes. I found out that she was a different girl from what I thought, and— and— Well, there you are!” and Edgar sniggered significantly.

“I see,” and Baxter spoke as though he were meditating.

“Oh, I am straight now,” went on Edgar, “and I really want to marry her. But you can see I can’t do it on the screw I’m getting, and I do think, Baxter, that, seeing our relationship, you might make things easy for me.”

“I can promise nothing,” replied Baxter after a somewhat long and painful silence. “As I told you just now, you badly let down a part of the business which might have been profitable—and I dare not, at present, give you another responsible post.”

“But, Baxter—”

“I can say nothing more at present, except that I will make inquiries, and if I find a suitable opening I shall, of course, think of you- Beyond that, however, I cannot go.”

When Edgar Butterworth left Barons Court that night he seemed in a very subdued state of mind, but from what Baxter could find out the next day, Edgar pretended to be highly elated at the result of their conversation. Indeed, he hinted at the possibility of the firm no longer being called "Lancasters," but "Lancaster and Butterworth." To do him justice, however, he made no definite statement with regard to this possibility, as he called it, but only threw out innuendos of what the future might bring forth.

Baxter could not help being amused when he heard of these things, but he did not take the trouble to refute them. Why should he? He treated Edgar just as he treated a score of others in his position, and neither by word nor look confirmed the stories which he had set afloat.

Two days after Edgar’s visit to Barons Court, when passing through the general office, he saw Ruth Townley seemingly busy at work. Making his way to her, he inquired as to the state of her mother’s health.

“She is better, thank you, Mr. Lancaster.”

“I am glad of that,” he replied. “I was afraid from what Mr. Blackburn told me that you were very anxious about her.”

“I was.”

“Is it heart trouble from which she suffers?”

“Yes, Mr. Lancaster.”

“Has she anyone near her in case of a sudden attack?”

To this Ruth Townley gave no definite answer, but by the look in her eyes Baxter concluded that she was very anxious.

“I hope you will let me know if I can do anything for you, Miss Townley,” he said, speaking with more than ordinary eagerness.

But beyond a polite expression of thanks for his inquiry, the girl gave no sign as to what she felt.

There were a dozen watchers and listeners to the conversation which I have recorded, but no one attached any importance to it, save “that it was very kind of Mr. Baxter to speak to that lass Townley.”

Be that as it may, on the following day Edgar found his way to Baxter’s office with an anxious look in his eyes.

“Anything the matter?” asked Baxter.

“Yes. She’s turned me down.”

“Turned you down?” queried Baxter.

“Yes. You know what I told you. I admitted that I was mistaken in her, and that she was a different girl from what I thought. I told you, too, that I was nuts on her, and that I meant to marry her. But I have had no luck.”

“No luck!” and Baxter noted that his voice was sullen, while an angry gleam shot from his eyes.

“That’s what I said. I thought when I spoke to her the day after I’d seen you that she seemed to appreciate the interest I took in her. So last night I had things out with her. I told her plainly that I was gone on her, and I offered to marry her.”

“Well, what happened then?”

“She treated me like dirt,” replied Edgar. “Anybody might have thought from the way she spoke that it was she who was related to members of the firm, and it was I who was just an understrapper! Anyhow, there you are! I thought I had better tell you, because I was a bit too confident. Naturally, I never thought she would turn me down. On the other hand, I imagined she would jump at me, and I am afraid I went so far as to tell one or two people what I intended to do. As a consequence Tom Dixon and George Lister, to whom I told my intentions, went around this morning and spoke to her as though it were a settled matter.”

“Well,” asked Baxter who, in spite of himself, was interested in Edgar’s story, “what happened?”

“What happened! I might have been a day laborer who had declared his love to a high born lady! I am telling you this because I think you ought to know, as perhaps Lister, with whom I haven’t been very friendly for some time, may try and make capital out of it. But that’s the truth, Baxter, and nothing but the truth! Oh, it may be that I hinted to them both that you are

going to give me a responsible post, but I said nothing definite! I swear I said nothing definite! All the same, I think you might let me down lightly.”

“Let you down lightly!” replied Baxter, who for some reason or other, could not help laughing at Edgar’s woebegone face.

“Yes, let me down lightly. It will be all over Baronstown that I asked Ruth Townley to marry me, and she wouldn’t. But if you will give me a job that will seem to reinstate me; it will make the other easier to bear. You see, I am afraid I bragged about it. I hadn’t a shadow of doubt but that she would accept me.”

“Why? Had she given you any hope?”

“No, I can’t say she had. But what of that? Who would think that a girl like that would say no to me!”

When Edgar had gone Baxter sat for a long time alone thinking over their interview. He wondered if he could do anything to help this girl, Ruth Townley. Yes, he could not help thinking about her. He had more interest in her than in any other girl in the firm. He remembered the first interview he had had with her after he had been informed of Edgar’s behavior. He had thought at the time what a superior girl she was, and how different she was from the other female clerks of the firm. For that matter, she seemed to him superior to any young lady of his acquaintance.

He remembered the night when going home from his club she had rushed past him; remembered, too, the sob of agony which escaped her. Even then he could not help thinking of her superiority to other girls of her class, but now as he thought of her, all class distinctions were broken down. He recalled her face as he had spoken to her in the general office, and remembered that even then he had thought how refined and how attractive she looked.

Well, he was glad that she had given Edgar his lesson. After all, this so-called cousin of his was nothing but a vulgar bounder, while the girl had an inherent right to regard him as utterly beneath her.

He at length made his way to Nehemiah Blackburn’s office.

“About that Miss Townley concerning whom you rung me up when I was at Templeton Court the other day,” he said.

“Yes, Mr. Baxter?”

“I learn that her mother is better.”

Blackburn shook his head. “I am afraid they are in a bad way, Mr. Baxter,” he said.

“In a bad way! What do you mean?”

“From what I can learn, they haven’t a penny beyond what the girl earns here, and almost all of that must be eaten up in doctors’ bills. I believe that girl half starves herself for her mother’s sake. I wish you could do something,” he added.

“What can I do?” asked Baxter. Then, after hesitating a second, he went on: “Will you visit the house at the first possible opportunity, Nehemiah, and do anything you can for them? You have my full permission,” he added.

“Certainly, if you wish it, Mr. Baxter,” replied Blackburn. “But wouldn’t they think it more kindly like if you called yourself? I’ve been told, although I know nothing of the truth of it, that they belong to that part of the old Townley family who have come down in the world. Have you ever seen her mother?”

Baxter shook his head.

“She’s a grand lady; that’s what she is,” replied Blackburn. “They may live in a poor little cottage, and have hard work to pay the rent, but—but—”

“I think I had better not call myself,” interrupted Baxter, “but I Wish you would, Nehemiah.”

“I have called,” replied Blackburn, “and that’s what makes me hesitate about doing what you told me. You see, Mr. Baxter, they are as proud as Lucifer; and while, in a way, they are very homely, I am afraid to say or do anything that would hurt their pride. You understand me?”

“I am afraid I don’t.”

“Well, on the evening after I rung you up I went to their house, and after I had given your message that Miss Townley could stay with her mother as long as she liked, I sort of hinted that you would pay for Mrs. Townley to go to Southport or the Lakes, or some place like that; but I daren’t go on.”

“Why?”

“They both came down upon me like a thousand of bricks, and as good as told me that they were not paupers to receive charity. That’s why you should go yourself, Mr. Baxter.”

“Wouldn’t it be possible to make arrangements for Miss Townley to accompany her mother to Southport or somewhere?”

“I have no doubt, Mr. Baxter,” replied Blackburn. “But how are they to find the money? You see, they are not like ordinary people. Of course, it may be all a story about their belonging to the Townleys, and in any case, they can’t belong to the main line of the family; but they are both ladies,



and I daren't offer them charity. I am serious, Mr. Baxter! I daren't do what you say, but I do suggest that you should go up and talk with Mrs. Townley. Do it in office hours while Miss Townley is at work," he added. "I believe the old lady would be more amenable to reason when her daughter is away. She's the one who makes it difficult for anyone to help them."

This conversation took place about three o'clock in the afternoon, and shortly afterwards Baxter, wondering what he could do to render the help he desired, found his way into the streets of the town. He had not gone far when he came to the bookshop which had interested him some time before. Looking in at the window he noted the spot where the book "In Quest of Happiness" lay, but it was no longer there. He examined other volumes which were in the window, but saw nothing to interest him.

He was on the point of turning away when a car drove up the street, stopped close by where he was, and a girl's voice accosted him.

"I am angry with you," it said.

Turning, he saw Evelyn Templeton.

# 19. The Danger Zone

“THEN THE SUN IS BLOTTED OUT, and the sky is black with clouds,” was Baxter’s laughing response.

“No, no,” cried the girl. “I am not to be put off like that!” She was on the sidewalk by this time, and stood close to him. “What I say is really true, and if I hadn’t been of a very forgiving nature, I should never speak to you again.”

“What unpardonable sin have I committed now?” he asked, still laughing.

“The other night when you were up at Templeton you left me lonely and forsaken,” cried the girl. “You pleaded that you must leave us, and come to this smoky hole of a town. Of course, I accepted your plea, especially as I knew that you boasted you always obeyed the call of duty; but days have passed since then. Why have I received no word since? Why haven’t you put in an appearance, and pleaded for forgiveness?” She spoke in tones of playful anger.

“Fair lady,” pleaded Baxter with mock humility, “when I told you that duty called me away I was heartbroken.”

“I don’t believe it,” replied the girl. “There was a look of evident relief on your face when you left me. Tell me, isn’t that true?”

“Rather, wasn’t there relief in your heart?” he parried.

“Baxter,” and the girl’s voice took on a honeyed tone, “it was hard to forgive you, especially when I was hoping—”

“Hoping what?”

She seemed on the point of telling him, and then, While a look of confusion was on her face, she appeared to be trying to find words to answer his question. “I am not going to forgive you,” she went on, “until you tell me what you did when you left me.”

Quick as lightning he remembered how he had driven madly away from Templeton Court, and finally stopped at the house of the old Scotch minister. Should he tell her? No, he could not. It was utterly incongruous to

be thinking of what he had said to Peggy Edgecumbe, and afterwards to her uncle, while he remembered the time he had spent at Templeton Court with Evelyn Templeton.

Then something else came to him. Half an hour or so before, he had been talking with Nehemiah Blackburn about Ruth Townley. He had been trying to find some means whereby he could render help to people who, although bearing an old name, were now living in one of the cheapest cottages in the town. But no he would not think about her.

“Won’t you tell me why you left me, Baxter?”

Yes, he could not deny it, Evelyn Templeton had allowed him to see that she cared for him; had in fact, told him as plainly as words could tell that he had only to ask her, and she would become his wife.

At that moment a heavy dray, laden with great packages of cotton, passed them. The road was granite paved, while the steel lines of the tramway ran along the center. At that moment, too, the tram came from one direction, while the heavy lorry was coming from the other. A moment later the road was blocked with the traffic, and both vehicles stood still.

“It’s difficult to talk here, isn’t it?” he asked. “Let’s get out of this busy street.”

“Yes, let’s!” cried the girl. “Do you know I have never been in that park, Lancaster Park, which your grandfather gave to the town years ago. Shall we go there?”

Somehow, he could hardly tell why, but he wished she hadn’t asked this. The last time he had been in the park, Peggy Edgecumbe had been with him, and he remembered the subject of their conversation. Still, he mastered his aversion. “All right,” he said. “Let’s!”

A minute later they were walking side by side along the smoky streets in the direction of Lancaster Park. Baxter knew that many watchful eyes were upon them, and that the people were drawing conclusions concerning them. It was not often that Evelyn Templeton favored Baronstown with her presence. The shops there were not of a nature for her to patronize; while the town itself could not by any stretch of the imagination be called attractive. What reason had she, therefore, for coming, except to—?

A little later they had left the industrial part of the town, and had found their way to Lancaster Park.

“I shall begin to think that you are not glad to see me,” she said at length.

“Whatever put such an impossible thought as that into your mind?” he asked with a laugh.

“You are so quiet, and there is such a curious look in your eyes. By the way,” she went on, “you remember the man and the woman you interviewed when you were at Templeton Court the other day?”

“Of course,” he replied.

“I have done as you told me.”

“In what way?” and he looked at her questioningly.

“I have engaged them both,” she replied. “Don’t you ever hint again that I am not influenced by your wishes! Of course you will come, Baxter?”

“Come?” he repeated. “I hardly understand. Come where? Come when?”

“Of course you must come! I have told you early so that you may keep the date free. You will, won’t you?”

He looked at his diary in answer to her question. “I am afraid it will be impossible,” he said. “I have an important engagement in London on that day.”

“Oh, but, Baxter!” and there was real concern in her voice. “You must be there!” For Evelyn Templeton had remembered her promise to her two girl friends, one of whom had told her of her engagement.

There was such concern in her voice that Baxter could not help feeling startled. Looking at her, too, he felt the charm of her presence; so much so that for the moment he almost forgot himself. “Would you care if I couldn’t come?” he asked.

“Care!” was her reply. “Of course I should care— Baxter!”

He noticed the flush on her cheeks and the bright light in her eyes; while she, thinking perhaps that she had revealed her own feelings before Baxter had made any declaration to her, sought to cover her confusion by changing the subject. “It was kind of your grandfather to give this park to the town,” she said. “I remember the opening well. There was some talk about Royalty coming, wasn’t there?”

“I believe there was,” he replied.

“And your grandfather had to be contented with the Prime Minister, or someone like that?”

“Yes.”

The conversation had now drifted into a channel which, although he could not tell why, was not pleasant to him.

“I heard that your grandfather was offered a baronetcy, or a peerage, or something of that sort. Was it true?”

“Yes, but he didn’t accept it, thank heaven!”

“Why?” she asked. “He has done more for the town than anyone else!”

He could not help feeling angry with her, in spite of the honeyed tones in which she spoke to him. “We Lancasters are commoners,” he replied. “My grandfather would hate to appear as something which he was not. It is as Amos Lancaster he has been known, and will, I trust, always be known.”

She could not have told why, but she felt she had touched a wrong note. “Let’s go to that seat under the trees,” she said a little hurriedly, and he obeyed her bidding.

He was angry, although he would not have admitted it. This was not altogether because Evelyn Templeton had spoken as though his grandfather had given the park to the town in the hope that he would get a title in return, but by the fact that the seat which she had suggested was the one on which Peggy Edgecumbe had sat with him weeks before.

“Have I done anything to offend you?” she asked as, sitting by his side, she looked with wistful eyes across the park.

“Offend me? Good heavens, no! Don’t you realize that it is impossible for you to offend me?”

“But I have; I am sure I have.”

“What makes you think of such a thing?”

“You are so reserved, so—oh, I don’t know what! But please don’t take any notice of me. I am in a strange humor!”

Glancing at her, he could not help seeing the tears well up in her eyes, or noticing her quivering lips, and as he looked he felt his heart beating faster than was its wont.

Baxter Lancaster was a young man, and as a young man was susceptible to feminine charms. It was weeks since his grandfather had first expressed to him the wish that he should choose Evelyn Templeton as his wife, and had told him of his own assurance that he had but to ask her in order to possess one of the fairest girls in Lancashire, as well as one who had the best blood in England flowing in her veins. His heart had not responded to this. Indeed a sudden revulsion of feeling had come to him as a consequence. This, perhaps, was partly the reason why he had spoken to Peggy Edgecumbe, and why he had not fallen in with his grandfather’s wishes.

All the same, Evelyn Templeton had thrown a kind of spell upon him, and had charmed him by the thousand witcheries by which a beautiful and clever woman can charm a man.

Her feelings towards him, too, seemed manifest, and he wondered whether he had, in any way, said or done anything which might lead her to think it was his duty to ask her to become his wife.

He reflected, too, that there might be a certain fittingness in becoming betrothed to her in the park which his grandfather had given to the town. He was sure that the old man would be pleased. It was only the night or so before, that he had repeated his wish and told him that he, Baxter, would never be happy while he remained a single man. Why, therefore, could he not do as the old man wished? He would never find a handsomer bride, nor one who was more capable of gracing such a home as Barons Court.

He turned towards her again, and saw that the tears were still welling up in her eyes, and that her lips were still quivering. Surely, although he might search the land all over, he could never find a more fitting bride, or one more capable of satisfying not only his longings, but his ambitions. They were alone, too. As far as he could see, there was no one else in the park. Thus, even although he might take her in his arms, there would be no eye to witness the fact.

His lips parted as if to speak. Yes, he would, once and for all, end this state of indecision, and decide his fate.

But he did not speak a word. Even as his declaration trembled upon his lips, he heard the words which Peggy Edgecumbe had spoken to him weeks before, on the day of the fête. *“The love of a lifetime! The love of a lump of clay! For that’s all it is, Mr. Lancaster!”*

The words rang in his ears as plainly as on that first night in June, and he felt the scorn in her voice; and more than scorn. He felt that what she had said was true, and he knew that what he had been on the point of saying to Evelyn Templeton must remain unspoken. “Let’s get away from here,” he said. “It’s stifling beneath these trees.”

He rose to his feet as he spoke, while a startled look shone from the girl’s eyes. Whether she had expected a different ending to their meeting, I do not profess to say. Certain it is that without a word she rose, and walked back towards the town by his side.

*“The love of a lifetime! The love of a lump of clay! For that’s all it is, Mr. Lancaster!”*

Why did the girl's words haunt him, so? Why was he still angry at what she had said to him?

A few minutes later they were back in the town. Yes, he was angry with himself. He felt that he had behaved like a bounder, a clown. He had for weeks, both by looks and words, led Evelyn Templeton to believe that he would declare himself. Ought he not, then, as a man of honor, to speak?

"I must go back home now," she said. "There, don't you see, Wilkins, the chauffeur, is waiting for me with the car? Won't you come back to Templeton to tea, and have a chat with my father?"

Before he could reply, an influence hitherto unknown to him seemed to surround him. Someone he had hitherto failed to notice was passing along the causeway close by his side. Turning, he became oblivious of Evelyn Templeton.

It was a girl almost shabbily dressed who passed him.

For that matter, the frock she wore might have been home-made; while her head-gear could not have cost more than a few pence. But she walked like a queen, and he felt the blood rush into his head as she passed him. This girl was as far removed from Evelyn Templeton as day was removed from night. She thought different thoughts, spoke a different language, and even although she breathed the same air, she lived in a different world.

For a moment their eyes met; but only for a moment.

The girl passed him without a word; without even a nod of recognition.

Of course he knew who she was! She was Ruth Townley, one of a number of typists who worked in the main office at Lancaster's. Only a little while before he had been talking with Nehemiah Blackburn about her, and had suggested that he, Nehemiah, should seek to render her some help.

"Won't you come up to Templeton?" he heard Evelyn Templeton say again. "I am sure my father would be pleased to see you."

At that moment the town hall clock began to strike, and the heavy tones of the bell reverberated through the smoky air. "I can't! I daren't!" he almost shouted in reply. "Thank you ever so much, Miss Templeton, but I had forgotten. I must hurry back."

"Hurry back where?" asked the girl, evidently disappointed.

"To the office," he replied. "There are a hundred things waiting for me to do."

"Anyhow, don't forget the fete," she cried. "Write it in your diary at once!"

“I won’t forget,” was his reply. “You may depend upon me.”

“And—and when are you coming up to Templeton again?” he heard her say.

But the noise of another heavy lorry passing at that moment seemed to make a reply impossible, and lifting his hat, he hurried back to the huge Lancaster buildings.

A minute later he had fastened himself in his own room.

He heard his own secretary at work in the adjoining office; heard, too, in the near distance the roar of the looms in the great factory, but he was scarcely cognizant of what was happening.

A knock came to his office door, and his secretary entered. “Here are today’s letters, Mr. Lancaster,” she said. “Will you sign them now?”

“Not now, soon,” and she did not at all understand the tone of his voice.

“I beg your pardon,” the girl replied, “but would it be possible for me to get away at five o’clock?”

He looked at his watch, and noticed that it wanted a quarter of an hour to that time. “Certainly,” he replied, “leave whenever you like.”

“But I would like to get the letters off before I go, Mr. Lancaster.”

He seemed like a man who had been awakened out of a dream. “Oh yes, yes; I’ll attend to them at once!” He hastily scribbled his signature on a number of sheets of paper, and then, with a gesture, told her to go. “You are sure there is nothing more?” he said.

“Nothing more, Mr. Lancaster,” and she left the room.

“I didn’t know, I forgot!” he muttered to himself. “Thank God she is gone!” But it was not his secretary that he had in mind.

He went to the door and locked it. Then he came back to his office chair and buried his face in his hands.

Something had happened to him; something which he did not expect, and of which he had never dreamed!

Again the words rang in his ears. “*The love of a lifetime! The love of a lump of clay! For that’s all it is, Mr. Lancaster!*”

But he was not thinking of Peggy Edgecumbe, neither did he associate the words with Evelyn Templeton. His thoughts were elsewhere, and he was oblivious to everything, save of the memory of a young girl who had passed near him a few minutes before in the street. She was almost shabbily dressed, and yet she bore the marks of a great lady. She was only one of a number of typists whom he employed, but she was as far above Evelyn .,



Templeton as the stars. He saw her finely chiseled features; saw her great grey eyes, eyes that spoke of infinite things, and he knew that something had come into his life of which before then he had been in ignorance.

But he had no realization of what it was. In fact, he was too excited to understand the meaning of what had happened to him.

A knock came to the door, and rushing hurriedly towards it he unlocked it. "Yes, Nehemiah, what is it?" he asked, as the head of the general office came into the room.

"I think I ought to tell you that I took the liberty of sending Miss Townley off," Blackburn informed him.

"Sent Miss Townley off! Do you mean discharged her?"

"Oh no, nothing of the sort!" replied Blackburn hastily; "but I sent her home. It wasn't quite leaving off time, but she looked so pale and ill that I was sure you would think I did right in telling her to leave early."

He did not at all know why it was, but he felt his heart beat lighter. Perhaps it was because Blackburn had assured him that he had not discharged the girl, but had simply sent her out of the office that she might get a little fresh air.

But that was not all. Of course he was sorry that the girl in whom he had suddenly become so interested was ill. Nevertheless, he was glad that the head of the office had treated her kindly. Yes, and more than that—he now saw means whereby he could go to the cottage where Ruth Townley lived without causing gossip.

"I thought I ought to tell you, Mr. Baxter," continued Nehemiah, as though anxious for his young master's approval.

"You did quite right, quite right," he urged eagerly. "Did you say she was ill?"

"No, I don't say that," replied Nehemiah, "but—" And then he lapsed into silence.

A few minutes later Baxter was in the street, and was driving furiously towards that part of the town in which Mrs. Townley had taken up her abode. He had reflected the moment Blackburn had left him, that Ruth Townley, when he had seen her in the street, was not walking towards her mother's house at all, but in the opposite direction. Possibly, probably, he reflected, she was going into Lancaster Park, from which he had just come. If that were so, he would have time to reach her mother's cottage before she

would be able to arrive there. At any rate, he drove furiously in that direction, and presently reached it.

As my readers who may know the nature of Lancashire towns will be aware, they are anything but beautiful. "I think it was John Ruskin who called the streets of Lancashire towns"long lines of ugliness." Anyhow, that description was not far from the truth. There are but few gardens, and what gardens there are are generally repellent, rather than places of beauty. There are no rustic cottages, and but few little detached buildings to attract those who seek privacy and seclusion. Not that their interiors lack comfort. On the other hand, there are few parts of England where the cottages of the poor people are more replete with the solid comforts of life than those to be found in the manufacturing districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

It was in a narrow, sordid street that Mrs. Townley had taken up her abode. There were at least a hundred other houses in the same street, exactly of the same dimensions, and which presented the same appearance.

Baxter knocked at the door of one of these houses, which was almost immediately opened by a girl of perhaps twelve years of age. "Does Mrs. Townley live here?"

"Ay!"

"Is she in?"

"Ay, but she is very poorly, and is not able to get out," was the reply. "That's why I'm here. Miss Ruth works at Lancaster's, and she didn't like to go away and leave her mother alone."

The girl evidently belonged to the working classes. She looked clean and comfortably dressed, but she spoke with a strong Lancashire accent. He had been quick to notice the prefix with which she had prefaced Ruth Townley's name. For Lancashire people are not much given to the small conventional politenesses which are more common in the southern parts of the country. A Lancashireman seldom says Sir, or Mister, or Madam. He is none the less polite because of this. Nevertheless, he rarely uses what is generally known as polite terms, but when he does, it is a pretty sure indication that he looks upon the person to whom he has applied it as "a cut above" his own class.

Thus Baxter knew when he heard Ruth Townley spoken of as "Miss Ruth" that she was highly regarded by the girl who spoke to him. "Can I see Mrs. Townley?" he asked.

The girl looked at him doubtfully. "I'll see," she said. "What do people call you?"

“My name is Baxter Lancaster,” replied the young man.

Evidently his importance increased from that moment. “You are the new owner of Lancaster’s, and grandson to owd Amos?” cried the child quickly.

Baxter nodded.

“Ay, I am sure you can come in,” she asseverated. Whereupon Baxter followed her into the room.

The cottage was extremely small, although the builders had made the most of their space. It consisted of a passage perhaps two feet and a half wide; a front room about eight feet square, designated “the room”; and the kitchen, or general living-room, which stood at the end of the passage, and which was slightly larger.

“Mrs. Townley is in th’ room,” the child informed him.

The little place was spotlessly clean, but on every hand were evidences of poverty. The furniture of the downstairs rooms, at all events, was of the simplest and plainest nature, and apparently had been bought in the cheapest market. That was at first glance. On further examination, however, there were evident signs that the people who lived there had once “seen better days.” For example, there was on the mantelpiece a clock which would be described by a connoisseur as “a little gem.” A corner cupboard, too, had on its shelves some old and what looked like valuable pieces of china; while three pictures hung on the walls which, although so small that they could scarcely be described as other than miniatures, were nevertheless evidently painted by an artist.

“Pardon me for calling,” said Baxter on entering, “but I felt I must. My name is Baxter Lancaster, and as your daughter is one of our secretaries, and has informed the head of her office that she had to be absent owing to your illness, I took the liberty of calling to see how you were.”

“That is very kind of you, and I am sure I appreciate your thoughtfulness.”

Looking, Baxter saw a lady of perhaps between forty and fifty years of age who, at first, appeared well and strong. A second glance, however, revealed a hectic flush on her cheeks which, even to his inexperienced eyes, spoke of heart trouble. “I am afraid you are not very strong,” Baxter ventured.

“I hope my illness has not inconvenienced or disarranged the office work?” remarked the lady.

“Not at all, as far as I know,” replied Baxter. He was guarded in his speech because he saw that behind the woman’s eyes was a quick brain, and that she would be annoyed if he manifested anything but an ordinary interest. “All the same,” went on the young man, “I hope you will forgive me if I am absolutely frank.”

“Certainly. Hasn’t my daughter done her work to your satisfaction?” and there was something defiant in the tones of her voice.

“Oh, perfectly,” replied Baxter. “It is not that at all, and I ask your forgiveness if what I say appears in the slightest degree impertinent. But illness is always expensive, and I was wondering if I might make a suggestion.”

“A suggestion?” queried the lady. “Pardon me, but I don’t understand.”

“You have been accustomed to something different from a cottage in a Lancashire manufacturing town,” he said.

The woman looked at him questioningly, but made no remark.

“This is what I wanted to say,” went on Baxter. “Your daughter is appreciated very highly at Lancaster’s, and I was wondering whether, especially in view of your daughter’s small salary, you do not find it difficult to meet the expenses, especially during these times.”

“Has my daughter complained?” and there was a suggestion of hauteur in her voice.

“Far from it,” replied Baxter. “If she had complained I might, without a suggestion of offense, have increased her salary. But as, owing to an unfortunate happening, her salary had, without my knowledge, been decreased, I was wondering whether something could not be done.”

He knew that this was awkwardly put, and he felt angry with himself because he had not put what he meant in better language; but, in any case, he had said what he wanted to say.

“I don’t understand you. My daughter’s salary decreased? She never told me anything about it!”

Baxter felt sure he knew the reason why Nehemiah Blackburn had remarked upon Ruth Townley’s pale face, and said that the girl had not had enough to eat. She had been careful to hide from her mother anything like a decrease in her salary, by herself suffering privation in silence.

“Really, Mr. Lancaster,” went on the lady, “I want to know the meaning of what you have just said. My daughter’s salary decreased! Please tell me why.”

Baxter hesitated. He was anxious that this proud woman should know the truth without in any way wounding her feelings. "I am not casting any reflections upon your daughter. Please understand that, Mrs. Townley," asseverated the young man. "Indeed, it is all the other way. It is a little difficult for me to explain, and yet I think, upon reflection, that you will understand the situation. Your daughter was, I believe, engaged as one of the secretaries at Lancaster's by the head of the office, and her engagement was confirmed by my grandfather. I, personally, had nothing to do with it. Had I known what I do now, it is probable that things would have happened otherwise."

He hesitated a moment, and then went on: "It will be no news to you, Mrs. Townley, that your daughter is of more than ordinary attractiveness, and I was very angry to learn some little time ago that a distant relative of mine, who was placed at the head of a department, acted towards Miss Townley in a manner that was altogether reprehensible."

"What was the name of your relative?" asked the woman peremptorily.

Baxter told her.

"Yes," was her answer. "I remember. Of course, it is impossible to take serious notice of it, and yet he came here the other night and proposed marriage to my daughter. But in what way has this decreased Ruth's salary?"

"In this way," replied Lancaster. "Before proposing marriage to your daughter, he had so far forgotten himself as to speak to her as he might speak to an ordinary mill girl. I was so incensed that I gave instructions for Miss Townley to be removed from young Butterworth's office, and, I am sorry to say, that owing to her ceasing to be his secretary, and as she was removed to the general office, her salary was automatically decreased. I tried to remedy this, and spoke to her personally about the matter; but she would not listen to me. Pray do not think I am suggesting anything as a matter of charity, Mrs. Townley, but your daughter is so appreciated and does her work so excellently, that I would like, if I may, to so far atone for causing the decrease, to make it more instead of less."

Upon this the woman asked some sharp, pointed questions, which Baxter answered without hesitation.

"Of course I know of you, Mr. Lancaster," she said presently. "I had hoped to be present at your birthday fête on June 1st, in which case I should not, perhaps, have met you as a stranger today; but I had one of my

unfortunate heart attacks, and although I tried to persuade Ruth to go to the fête by herself, she would have none of it. And I would like to say this, Mr. Lancaster. When Ruth obtained the situation at your mills, I determined that she should be treated entirely on her merits."

Baxter nodded in acquiescence.

"Of course," went on the woman, and there was a touch of pride in her voice, "I am well aware that Ruth is far removed from those with whom she has to associate. It is unnecessary for me to enlarge on that now. What I want to ask you is this. Would you, entirely on my daughter's merits, and having no regard to the difference which exists between her and the other girls, suggest what you suggested just now?"

"I would indeed," replied Lancaster warmly. "It is true I have scarcely spoken to Miss Townley, but I was more angry than I can say at young Butterworth's presumption, and I would long ago have rectified the mistake that had been made but for your daughter's evident distaste of such a thing."

He looked at his watch as he spoke, and then noting the time, he went on quickly: "Thank you for consenting to this, Mrs. Townley," he said. "I hate the idea of underpaying anyone of our staff, and you have removed a great burden from my mind. But I must be going now. Good evening."

"Will you not stay a little longer?" said the woman questioningly. "I expect my daughter home at any minute now."

But Baxter, who was anxious to leave the house before her arrival, made his way towards the door.

He had scarcely reached the street, however, when Ruth Townley came in sight. Neither of them spoke, but as the man's eyes flashed into those of the girl he felt his heart give a great leap. It was not, of course, because their meeting was unexpected, or because she manifested any surprise at seeing him. Perhaps it was because he saw the same light shining in her eyes as he had seen shining in those of old Ned Stuttard's not long before, and which had shone in the eyes of the old Scots minister.

## 20. "Owd Amos" Shows His Heart

"I FEEL ASHAMED OF MYSELF," said Lancaster to himself. "Fancy my having to go to such a woman, in such a house, and proposing to her that I should give her daughter a little more salary!"

Nevertheless, in a way he could not understand, he was glad that it was so, and as he made his way towards the town he felt happier than he had felt for weeks. "I have not seen Stephen Wallace for a long time," he reflected as he neared the center of the town. "I wonder if he has got back or not?"

He diverted his car from the road in which he had been going as this thought passed through his mind, and made his way to a different part of the town. "I am sure I heard he was home," he reflected, as presently he emerged into what was known as the St. George's end of the town. "At any rate, here we are!"

He leapt from the car, and made his way towards the house, on the gateposts of which was carved " St. George's Manse."

A minute later he heard a laughing voice: "Now that's what I call real good, Lancaster! I have been longing to see you!"

"Where have you been?" asked Baxter. "You didn't tell me when I saw you last that you were going away, especially for such a long time! I have heard that for the last three Sundays there has been a stranger in St. George's pulpit."

"You didn't, by any chance, go and find out for yourself?" laughed Wallace.

"I am afraid I didn't."

"And you have never been to church once, you young heathen?"

"Not once," laughed Lancaster. "Why should I when I can go straight to the house of the young divine whom I have heard more than once called ' the prophet of St. George's?' Anyhow, when did you come home?"

“Got home last night. I was so excited that I couldn’t sleep, so I sat up all night writing a sermon.”

“And what have you been doing today?”

“This morning I continued the same soul-stirring work, and now, although it is only Friday evening, I have both my sermons ready for Sunday. This afternoon I have been making a round of visits. Isn’t that a frank and full account of my doings? Now then, you speak as freely about your affairs as I have spoken about mine. What have you been doing these last few days?”

“I’ll tell you on one condition,” laughed Lancaster.

“What’s that, my dear chap?” laughed Wallace. .

“That you will come up and have dinner with me tonight.”

“I can’t,” replied the young minister lugubriously. “There is an important deacons’ meeting from which I dare not be absent. But if you want me, I’ll come up immediately after.”

“Splendid!” exclaimed Lancaster. “At what time will your meeting be over?”

“It might be over at half-past eight, but I’m afraid they’ll drag it on until nine.”

“All right. I’ll send a car to St. George’s Church at half-past eight tonight, and I will instruct the chauffeur to wait until you are ready.”

“I say, you are a brick, Baxter!” exclaimed the young minister. “How have things gone with you while I have been away?”

“They haven’t gone at all,” replied Baxter. “All the same, I feel I have a lot to tell you.”

When he reached Barons Court a few minutes later he found that his grandfather had gone to bed. “What’s the matter?” asked the young man on rushing into old Amos’s room. “Aren’t you well?”

“Nay, I don’t know,” replied the old man. “I am feeling very old and tired, Baxter.”

“Nonsense!” replied Baxter briskly. “You haven’t an unsound organ in your body! I was talking with Dr. Black about you only a few days ago, and he assured me of it.”

“Ay, I believe I am sound in wind and limb,” replied old Amos. “But why should I want to live?” he asked a little plaintively.

“Now, grandfather, that won’t do!” exclaimed Baxter. “You live in the most beautiful place in the district, and—”



“Ay, but I am very lonely,” and he spoke plaintively, “and I believe I have felt more lonely since the first of June. You see, you took complete control then, and—”

“Nonsense!” broke in Baxter. “You are still boss at Lancaster’s, although I have taken on a lot of your work. And always remember this, too: you have the last word in everything.”

“Ay, I know, and I am noan complaining,” replied old Amos. “Thou art a good lad, Baxter, and you humor me in everything. But I can’t forget that I am nearly eighty, and that I can’t last much longer. Ay, you may say what you like, but it’s sad to be old. Baxter, if I could only believe that I should see your grandmother again, I’d be glad to die.”

“Nonsense!” protested Baxter.

“It’s not nonsense,” asserted old Amos, “and if I had my time to live over again I’d be different.”

“In what way?” asked his grandson. “Do you know, I’ve been talking about you today, and I was told that there is no man in Baronstown more respected than you.”

“Who said that?” asked the old man quickly.

“Evelyn Templeton.”

Old Amos cast a quick glance at his grandson, but did not speak for some time. “Why were you talking with that Templeton lass?” he asked presently. “Have you settled it up with her?”

Baxter shook his head.

“Then why were you talking with her?”

“I happened to meet her in the street,” replied the young man. “She had motored into Baronstown, and we met. It was quite by accident,” he explained, as if he was anxious to assure his grandfather that there was nothing arranged. “It was impossible to talk in the street,” he went on, “and she suggested going into Lancaster Park. That was where she told me that there was no man in Baronstown more respected than you.”

Old Amos looked at his grandson for nearly a minute without speaking, but he watched his face closely, as if anxious to find a confirmation of the thoughts which were passing through his mind. “Baxter, lad?” and the old man’s voice quivered.

“Yes, grandfather.”

“You have seen a good bit of that Templeton lass lately, haven’t you?”

“I have seen her two or three times.”

“Is she a woman of God, Baxter?”

“I don’t know,” replied Baxter. Then he continued with a laugh: “I don’t think she troubles as to whether there is such a Being.”

“Ah-h-h!” and as the word escaped the old man it sounded like a sigh. “Baxter,” he said presently, “I’ve been thinking a lot lately.”

“You think too much, grandfather. Why not have some of your old cronies here, and enjoy yourself?”

The old man shook his head. “Nearly all my old cronies, as you call them, are dead,” he replied. “That’s one of the sad things about getting old, Baxter; you have to bury all your friends.” He was silent a few seconds, and then went on: “Ay, I should be happy if your grandmother were with me, or—or—”

“Or what, grandfather?”

“If I were sure I was going to meet her again,” he replied. “I made a great mistake in life, Baxter, my lad. I have lived as though this world were everything. And it isn’t I I am sure it isn’t!—Yes, I know—I know people say a lot of nice things about me. They say I have done a great deal for the town—given an infirmary and a park, and that sort of thing! I know, too, that I might have had a title to my name if I wanted it. But, good God Almighty, what would a title amount to, Baxter?” and the old man spoke like one in a passion. “I’d give everything I possess to be sure that there was a God above me; that there was another life after this one was over, and that I should meet your grandmother again. I would for sure! That’s where I made my great mistake in life, my lad! When I was your age, and had your grandmother with me, I had no doubt about there being another life. Neither had your grandmother, and we were as happy as two turtle-doves. Then when she was taken away from me I tried to forget all my sadness and loneliness in business. I had your father to think of, and I said, ‘I’ll make money for my boy.’ And I just lived for money, Baxter; money and honor, and that sort of thing, and I forgot God—That was the greatest mistake in my life—I forgot God! Art’a listening, lad?” and the question escaped him as though he were angry.

“Yes, I am listening, grandfather.” (“I may as well humor him,” reflected the young man. “He’s getting old, and I expect his mind is weakening”)

“Nay, you are wrong,” asseverated old Amos, looking at his grandson. “My wits are as keen as ever they were, so don’t make any mistake! But

what I have told you is true. I have forgotten God, and I have allowed that part of my nature to die. What was it young Stephen Wallace said after Eliza Stuttard died? Oh, I remember the word now! He said a lot of us had allowed our spiritual natures to become atrophied. That's the word—ATROPHIED! I have allowed my spiritual nature to become atrophied, and I can't realize God! That's my curse!"

Baxter opened his lips as if to speak; then he realized that he had nothing to say. What message had he to give to this old man? Then a thought struck him. "I say, grandfather!" he cried.

"Ay, lad, what is it?"

"Stephen Wallace is coming up here after dinner. He's been away for several weeks, and he's just come home. Would you like to see him?"

"Ay, that I would," replied old Amos. "He's a grand lad, and he has learnt the secret of life, too! Bring him up when he comes."

Half an hour later Baxter Lancaster had had a bath, and was dressed ready for dinner. He did not know why it was, but he felt as though something had happened to him which had changed his outlook on life. What was it?

He went downstairs, and entered the dining-room where a servant was waiting to attend his every want, but somehow all the amenities of a rich man's house palled on him. He did not want the attention of the man who was there to wait on him. He wanted to be alone; he wanted to think. Nothing had happened to him, and yet a great deal had happened. He had met Evelyn Templeton in the town, the girl whom, for a long time, his grandfather had wanted him to marry. He recalled their conversation; remembered, too, the expression on her face and the flash from her eyes as she had talked to him in Lancaster Park. He had been on the point of making a declaration to her, but had not spoken a word. Why was it?...

She looked disappointed when they left the park and made their way back to the town...

Then a change had come over everything. Evelyn Templeton's face had become dim, while that of another had taken her place...

He took his place at the dinner-table, but did not know at all what the man was putting before him, nor could he have told what he was eating. After all, it did not matter...

He saw a wonderful pair of great grey eyes—eyes which told of unutterable longings; and not only longings, but realizations. He saw, too, a

fine, almost classical face...

What, after all, did the shabby clothes signify? What did they matter? Why trouble about the cheap hat she wore? This girl who worked for a small wage in Lancaster's general office had entered into the secret of God... Yes, he was sure she had, otherwise her great grey eyes would not have told such a story...

When dinner was over he could not have told what the servant had brought to him. He supposed he had eaten and drunk, but that was all.

He left the dining-room and found his way into his own snugery. He would now be alone, and free to think his own thoughts. Why had he been bothered that there had been a decrease in the girl's salary? Why had he been mad enough to go into Nelson Street and visit Ruth Townley's mother? There was not the slightest need for it! And what had come over his grandfather to talk as he had talked that evening?

Oh, dash it all, why couldn't people leave him alone! What was the matter? After all, it was only one of the servants who entered with his coffee.

Half an hour later Baxter heard the front-door bell ring, and watched attentively. "The Rev. Stephen Wallace, please, sir," announced a servant.

"Tell him to come in... Ah, Wallace, old man, I am glad to see you. You are a bit late, but never mind. By the way, my grandfather wants to speak to you."

"Your grandfather?" repeated Wallace. "Nothing's the matter, I hope?"

"No, I think not, but the old chap seemed a bit restless when I came home, and on my telling him of your coming he commanded me to bring you up immediately on your arrival. Come on."

The young minister followed Baxter to old Amos Lancaster's bedroom, but he scarcely went inside the door. "Hush!" whispered Baxter, "the old dear is asleep, and it will be better not to wake him up. Look at him."

Stephen Wallace looked, and saw that old Amos was sleeping as peacefully as a child. As far as Baxter could judge, too, the look which suggested peevishness and discontent had passed away from his face.

"Has anything happened?" asked Baxter, when a few minutes later the two young men were comfortably seated.

"Why do you ask?"

"You look excited. Are you?"

"It is possible I am."

“Why?”

“Of course, it is nothing to you,” Wallace replied. “You have no interest in what takes place in connection with a Congregational church! But I have, and I am more than a bit intrigued.”

“How? In What way?” asked Baxter.

“Well, for one thing, I knew nothing about this deacons’ meeting tonight. As I told you this afternoon, I’ve been out of town for these last three Sundays. I felt it wise to do so,” he added. “Do you remember that long conversation we had?”

“Perfectly,” replied Baxter.

“And you remember the invitation I had received from——?”

“Of course I remember.”

“I couldn’t help being a bit unsettled,” declared Wallace. “As you know, several things seem to hang upon my decision, and—and—well, anyhow, I thought it best to get out of Baronstown for a bit, and to look at things generally from a detached point of view, so I arranged for my pulpit to be supplied, and took a holiday.”

“Well, what is the result of your holiday? At any rate, you look well. Are you?”

“Yes, my health is all right.”

“Then what’s bothering you?”

“Look here, old man, you remember our last meeting?”

“Yes. By Jove, how time does fly! It was only a week or so after Eliza Stuttard’s funeral, while we are now far on in July—You say you went away to think over the position which we discussed then?”

“Yes, I had to. Everything had got so frightfully mixed up that I was not able to think of anything clearly, so, after a week or two of muddling, I decided that it would be better to get away. By Jove, old chap, it’s a funny situation, isn’t it?”

“What’s a funny situation?”

“Why, we had scarcely decided that we would like to be friends before we discovered that we were both in love with the same girl!”

“Are you still in love with her?” asked Baxter quietly.

“More than ever. Are you still in love with her?”

Baxter Lancaster could not tell why it should be so, but a pain shot through his heart when he heard his friend’s question; but he made no reply.

Instead, he looked steadily into the fire-place. "What was there so exciting about the deacons' meeting tonight?" he asked presently.

"Answer my question, and I will tell you," replied Wallace. "Are you still in love with Peggy Edgecumbe? I feel I am mean in asking you, but I must know."

"And I can't tell you," replied Baxter. "I really mean it, old man," he added as he watched Stephen Wallace's face. "But I want to tell you this. You need not fear that I am your rival. When I last saw her she was farther removed from me than ever. And even if she cared for me—H

"Yes, even if she cared for you?" asked Wallace eagerly, as his friend continued to be silent.

"I don't think I want her to care for me," Baxter Lancaster answered.

The young minister looked at him steadily, as if wondering what he meant. He could not at all understand the changed attitude which Baxter had adopted.

"I mean it, Stephen," went on Baxter. "I saw her not long since and had a long talk with her—not about love, or matrimony, or anything of that sort," he added quickly, "but about other things—and—I can't tell you why, but it's true. I felt, in a way I can't understand, that I had no desire any longer to become engaged to her. I am sure you want me to be perfectly frank, don't you?"

"Yes, naturally," replied Wallace, and his voice sounded strange and hoarse. "All the same, I should like to know why."

"Because—because— No, I really can't tell you. It was not because I had in any way lowered my opinion of her. Rather, I regard her more highly than ever. I think I am afraid of her," he added.

"Afraid of her! Why?"

"Did I tell you what I said to her on the night I proposed to her, or what her answer was?" asked Baxter.

The young minister fixed his eyes on his friend's face, but made no other reply.

"She seemed to regard my love-making as so much mockery," went on Baxter. "She said—and I don't think I shall ever forget her words, or the way she spoke them— *'The love of a lifetime! the love of a lump of clay! For that's all it means, Mr. Lancaster!'*—Anyhow, in a way I can't understand, I feel it would be a sort of sacrilege for me to think about being engaged to her. Have I answered you?"

“Yes, in a way you have, and I am awfully obliged to you, old man. After all, this little talk of ours shows that our friendship is real. It has stood one of the strongest tests that friendship is capable of. We have both been in love with the same girl, and we still remain friends.”

“You promised to tell me what this deacons’ meeting was about,” persisted Lancaster presently.

“Oh, yes. You know how matters stood between the church and myself when we last talked about it?”

“I remember that you were in doubt as to whether you should accept an invitation to another church,” replied Lancaster.

“Yes, I was. Two sets of influences were at work, and I didn’t know what was right for me to do.”

“And do you know now?” asked Baxter.

“Let me tell you about it,” answered the young minister eagerly. “As I told you several weeks ago, I thought I had reason in believing that my only chance of getting Peggy Edgecumbe to marry me was to go to that new church at —, and, in a way, I had almost decided to go. You see, I thought I was a putrid failure here at Baronstown, and that no one cared a tinker’s cuss whether I stayed or went away. I had reason for believing it, too. Practically no one came to hear me, and no interest seemed to be taken in what I thought or did. Then Eliza Stuttard told me I must stay for her husband’s sake, and—and, yes, Baxter, although our friendship was very young, I wanted to stay here for your sake. You see how matters stand now, don’t you?”

“Well, what have you decided to do?” asked Baxter.

Wallace remained silent for a few seconds before replying. Then he burst out laughing. “I didn’t know that anyone in the town had the least idea that I had been invited to another church,” he replied. “But some time after that chat I had with you, old Jonas Beswick, who is supposed to be a deacon of St. George’s, and who is regarded by the people of the town as one who cares about nothing in the world besides money, came to me and made me promise that I wouldn’t decide anything about the future for one month. You have no idea how funnily the old chap behaved; but I did as he wanted. Then two days ago I got a letter from the secretary of the church, telling me that an important deacons’ meeting was to be held tonight, and that it was essential that I should come home in order to be present.”

“I see,” replied Baxter. “Well, what was the result of it?”

Wallace did not speak for nearly a minute, and when at length he replied to Baxter's question his voice had become altogether changed, while a strange light shone from his eyes. "I hardly feel like telling you," he said. "I am almost afraid to. It seems I was altogether wrong in my thoughts about the impression I had made on the church. More than ten deacons were there, and every one of them testified to the fact that I was making God more real to them every day. Just think of it! They said that up to a few months ago they had practically lost all interest in the church, and didn't care a hang as to what became of it. Then they assured me that my advent created a new era; that I had caused a new spirit to be realized, and that it would be nothing short of a calamity for me to leave. It seems, too, that the secretary has been around to the various societies which exist in the church, and discovered that a work was going on of which I had not the slightest idea. Here are two letters—one from the Young Men's Class, which I had thought was nearly defunct, and another from the leader of the choir, which, as it seemed to me, had no thought or care for what they were singing, except for the music, telling me— No, I daren't repeat it; it would be sacrilege! Anyhow, read them for yourself."

Baxter read the letters, and then sank back in his chair in silence. "You are going to stay?" he said at length.

"Of course I am," replied Wallace simply, "and, Baxter, you have no idea how happy I feel! Here have I, for months, believed that I was a failure, when all the time—"

"And what of Peggy Edgecumbe?" asked Baxter presently.



## 21. Stephen Wallace's Ministry

"YES, WHAT OF PEGGY EDGECUMBE?" repeated Baxter. "Why, you told me a little while ago that while she might be persuaded to marry you if you accepted the call to that other church, she would never do so if you remained in Baronstown."

"Yes, I know," replied Wallace with a sigh.

"Doesn't she count, then?"

"Count! She must always count, old man! But for all that, duty must come first."

"You mean—?" queried Baxter.

"I mean that for months I have been like one beating the air. It has seemed to me that everything I have done has been in vain; that my ministry has been a mockery, and that my influence has been just seven times nothing. While now——"

"Yes," queried Baxter, after waiting for nearly a minute in silence—"now?"

"I wish you could have been at that deacons' meeting tonight," responded the other. "I never had such an eye-opener. I never dreamed that the people cared for me as they do. You know old Jonas Beswick, don't you? I have always regarded him, as I've been told that nearly everyone in the town regards him, as a skinflint, whose only god is money, and whose only reason for associating himself with St. George's Church was because he thought it would lead to business."

"Well?" Lancaster laughed.

"Don't be cynical, old chap," cried Wallace; "but tonight he blubbed like a baby. I thought he had nothing but an india-rubber machine in the place where his heart ought to be, but—but— Oh, I daren't tell you! It's too sacred to talk about, and that's a fact! Here have I been talking about myself as an unsuccessful minister, as one who has mistaken his calling, and all that sort of thing. Then tonight, when I least expected it, comes the news that my deacons have been holding prayer meetings while I have been

away, asking God to keep me in the town. Why, it's been grand, man; just grand!"

"And you decided to stay?"

"I couldn't help myself, Baxter. How could I P—And I haven't told you all even yet. I suppose Ned Stuttard had got an inkling of the deacons' meeting which was to be held tonight. Anyhow, not a quarter of an hour before I started for it, this letter came from him. Read it," and Wallace's hand trembled with excitement as he passed the envelope to his friend.

I who had looked upon death as the end, and the end all (he read), now know that death is only the beginning of life, and that I shall see my Eliza again. It will only be a little while, either, before we shall meet again, because I know she is waiting for me on the other side of the river. And I owe all this to you, my friend, ° all of it! Do you remember the text you preached from on the Sunday before you went away for your holiday .9 " And these things are recorded that ye might believe, and that believing ye might have Life through His name." And I have found Life, my son Wallace, Life! That is why I know my Eliza isn't dead, and that I shall see her again in the bowers of Eden...

"I have heard, my lad, that you are contemplating leaving us. Don't, for God's sake! I have learnt to love you as if you were my own son, and many others have done the same. I know you have been grieved because you thought your work was not a success, but I have learnt that we have nothing to do with either failure or success. It is for us to do the thing that God tells us to do.

"Don't you see?" cried Wallace, when at length Baxter had finished the letter. "I have, in my conceit, thought I was wise enough to teach old Ned Stuttard, while now he has become the teacher."

Again Baxter lapsed into silence, and for a long time did not try to answer his friend's words, and when at length he did speak, there was something defiant and truculent in his tones. "I don't believe in your Almighty God!" he cried.

Wallace looked at him like one startled.

"It's mockery, sheer mockery!" went on Baxter. "I've heard you say a good many times that one of the great things Jesus came to do was to reveal the infinite and the eternal love of an all-powerful God. And yet, even if what you say is true, that same God, after inspiring in your heart the most sacred thing He is able to do, He, at the same time, makes it impossible for you to realize the gladness of that love! I tell you, life is a great mockery, and the God who is behind it all is par excellence the greatest mocker and the greatest cynic that we know of!"

“I say, old man,” protested Wallace.

“But it is true!” cried the other. “Yes, I know I am shocking you; but I can’t help myself. Isn’t life a great hugger-mugger of contradictory elements? Isn’t it all a huge mockery? Oh, I know what I am talking about! It is only a few weeks ago since the first of June, when—”

He ceased speaking. He remembered that on the first of June he had dared to make love to Peggy Edgecumbe, who had, as it seemed to him, laughed at his love, and mocked it to scorn. And yet—

“What weight is the brain of a fully developed man?” asked Wallace with a laugh.

“What do you mean?”

“After all, it is only a few ounces. And shall we, who possess a few ounces of this grey matter which we call brain, have the impertinence to pass judgment on the ways of Eternal Wisdom! No, no, Baxter, old chap, your little outburst is very small after all, and say what you will, that Galilean carpenter knew more about God than you do.”

“But look here, Wallace—” protested Lancaster.

“Yes, yes, old man, I know all you would say,” interrupted the other, “but there is infinite wisdom in the words: ‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.’ If I understand life aright, it’s my job, first of all, to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

“And that means, I suppose,” sneered Baxter, “staying here at Baronstown, and talking week by week to a worldly lot of ignoramuses who have succeeded in making money, together with a few ignorant operatives and a dozen or so servant girls! Don’t mistake me, Wallace, I am as glad as a bird that you are going to stay, and if I thought there was any danger of your going, I would plead harder than you say old Jonas Beswick pleaded. But we have only a few years to live, and it does seem a shame that a chap with your abilities should waste his gifts in a place like Baronstown.”

“Can it be said that I have wasted what gifts I have in the face of old Ned Stuttard’s letter, to say nothing of the other two which I showed you? Besides, I am not without hope that I am going to do a great work in Baronstown even yet. And even if I don’t, even if St. George’s Chapel remains nearly empty—well, I shall have done ’d what I thought right.”

“While the girl you love—”

“Stop!” cried Wallace. “I don’t pretend to understand anything. The ways of Almighty God are beyond me. But mind you, Baxter, Almighty God lives, and although it seems impossible to me, what’s wrong will be made right, either in this world or in the next.”

Again a silence fell between the two young men which lasted for more than a minute. “Do you really believe that, Wallace?” asked Baxter presently.

“I not only believe it, I am sure of it,” replied the other. “Don’t mistake me, old man, with my mind I believe nothing; everything is a great hodge-podge of impossibility and confusion; but with my consciousness, which is greater than my mind, I know that all is well.”

“If I could say that,” cried Baxter, “I would, yes, I would turn this town upside down.”

“How would you do it?” asked Wallace.

“I—I don’t know,” and there was a suggestion of utter helplessness in Baxter’s voice.

Another silence fell between them, while both continued to pull at their cigars.

“I thought you seemed in doubt just now about your grandfather’s health,” ventured Wallace. “Isn’t he well?”

“He’s a wonderful old man is my grandfather,” Baxter said in reply; “but I don’t quite understand him.”

“How?”

“A change has come over him these last few days.”

“In what way?”

Baxter hesitated a few seconds before replying. Even although he regarded the young minister as a friend, the things he wanted to speak about seemed too sacred and too intimate for free discussion. “You heard my grandfather’s speech on the day of the fete?” he asked.

“Yes, I remember it perfectly.

“You saw several of the people who were on the platform with us?”

Wallace nodded. “Some people remarked to me,” he laughed, “that you had got some of the biggest bugs in the county with you.”

“My grandfather has been very ambitious about me,” Baxter said. “He didn’t want me to marry money, but he has wanted me to marry an old name.”

“I judged as much,” replied the young minister. “Wasn’t he thinking of the young lady who sat beside you on the platform?”

Baxter leapt to his feet like a man in wrath, and began to pace the room. “I am just a thing to be laughed at,” he cried; “and yet perhaps there are some excuses for me. On the day of the fete I proposed, as you know, to the young lady whom we have been discussing. As I told you, she wouldn’t have me, and she seemed to scorn my proposals. Yet within a day or so I was actually contemplating marriage with Evelyn Templeton. I don’t imagine I should have thought of her—in fact, I am sure I shouldn’t—but for my grandfather who was constantly begging me to propose to her, and to persuade her to be my wife. But there it was! Even although on one day I fancied I should only find happiness in obtaining a promise from Miss Peggy Edgecumbe, I was, within a few hours, actually thinking of marriage with someone else. Great heavens I don’t the facts of life laugh at Shakespeare’s rhapsody about the glory of man?”

He laughed sneeringly as he spoke, and then went on: “And I am about the meanest and most contemptible of them all! Yes, yes, I know I can excuse myself by saying that Miss Edgecumbe refused me, and that I thought of another woman because of the behests of my grandfather! —but there it is!”

He was silent again for a few seconds, and then went on: “A great change has come over grandfather lately,” he asserted.

“In what way?” asked Wallace.

“He doesn’t seem anxious any longer for me to marry into a great family. He seems to be thinking of other things.”

“What other things?”

“I don’t know.”

“Forgive me if I seem impertinent,” said Wallace, “but have you proposed to Miss Templeton?”

“Good heavens, no!” the other laughed. “I tried, yes, I honestly tried to think of her in that way, but I ’ couldn’t. I felt as though I would do anything to please grandfather. You see, he is a dear old thing, and he is the only father I have really ever known. Besides, I believe he would lay down his life for me. Anyhow, I have tried hard to fall in with his wishes, but I couldn’t. And now I believe, if he were to answer truthfully, he would say he was glad I hadn’t done it. And—and, Wallace, old man, there is something else I want to tell you.”

“What?” asked Wallace.

But although Baxter seemed on the point of telling him, he did not utter a word. Even to his friend, something seemed to forbid him to tell what he had in his mind.

That night Baxter Lancaster did not go to bed. Soon after Stephen Wallace had left him, Chadwick, old Amos Lancaster’s body-servant, came to Baxter in his snuggery. “I wish you would come upstairs, sir,” he said.

There was such a note of anxiety in Chadwick’s voice that Baxter looked up from the book he had been reading with a curious feeling in his heart. “What’s the matter, Chadwick?” he asked.

“It’s your grandfather, sir,” he said.

“Yes, what of him?”

“I don’t like the look of him, sir.”

Without another word Baxter rushed upstairs, and found his way into his grandfather’s bedroom. When he had been there with Stephen Wallace an hour or two before, the old man had been lying sleeping as peacefully as a baby; but now he sat up in bed with a look of stark terror in his eyes. “He’s come, Baxter!” the old man exclaimed.

“Who’s come?”

“Death!” and Baxter could not, in spite of himself, help shivering at the note there was in old Amos’s voice. “He came into the room, Baxter,” continued the old man. “I have seen him lots of times lately, but it has always been at a distance. All the same, I knew him. He had someone with him, too, whose face was strange to me. They both stopped at the end of the bed, and looked at me.”

“Now, grandad,” Baxter urged, “you mustn’t talk like that. I am with you now, and I am going to stay with you all through the night.”

“Are you, my lad?” the old man asked, and it was evident that his grandson’s words gave him comfort.

“Yes, I am. Just take hold of my hand, will you?— There! that’s better, isn’t it? You are not afraid now, are you?”

“I wasn’t afraid afore,” cried old Amos stoutly. “It wasn’t that. All the same, I didn’t like the look of Death, and I didn’t like the way he pointed me out to the felly who was with him. I heard him speak, too.”

“Nonsense, grandfather, you were only dreaming!”

“Nay, I wur noan dreaming,” replied the old man. “I saw them both stop at the end of the bed, and Death said to the other chap: ’ That’s old Amos

Lancaster. He hasn't got a soul, and he must soon enter into everlasting blackness.' I didn't like the look of him, Baxter."

"Shall I ring up the doctor?" asked Chadwick softly, who stood at Baxter's elbow.

But before the young man had time to reply old Amos broke in excitedly: "Nay, nay, I'll have no doctor! You'll stay with me, Baxter, my lad, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll stay with you, grandfather."

"You are better than any doctor, lad."

"All the same, you must sleep, grandfather, and to do that you must take one of those cachets which Dr. Black left here yesterday."

"All right, I'll take as many as you like," agreed the old man. "And, Baxter, you will keep Death from coming again, won't you?"

"All right," replied Baxter confidently, although something like fear entered his heart as he uttered the words.

"I don't want to die, my boy. It's not that I fear hell, or owt of that sort, but I remember what you chap Wallace said the day after Eliza Stuttard's funeral. He said that my soul was atrophied, and that atrophied meant dead. He said that such as I had starved our souls by neglect. Baxter, my boy, do you believe that God Almighty could put new life into my soul?"

No one but God knows how Baxter longed to answer his grandfather in the affirmative, but he could not. Having no faith himself, he could say no word of comfort to the old man. "Lie down, grandad," he evaded. "There now, let me put my arm around your shoulders, and hold your hand in mine. That comforts you, doesn't it?"

"Ay, it does," sighed old Amos. "All the same, I didn't like the look that Death had on his face. He seemed to be mocking me; he seemed to tell me that because I had atrophied my soul I should never see your grandmother again. But I must see her, Baxter! I must I I should go mad else!"

"Sleep, grandfather. And remember that I am with you while you sleep," he said soothingly.

The old man nestled among the sheets, and Baxter had hopes that he was obeying him, for his breath became more regular and less excited. Presently, however, he spoke again. "Baxter?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"You remember the night you found Ned Stuttard here, don't you?"

"I remember."

“We were talking about that verse in St. John’s Gospel,” the old man went on. “‘And these things are recorded that ye might believe, and that believing ye might have life through His name.’ That’s what I want, ’my boy; Life, Life! Do you think I could believe, Baxter?”

“Try,” the young man said, although it seemed like mockery to utter the word. .

“I will try,” old Amos replied.

A little later the old man sank into a quiet sleep, and Baxter, thinking he would lie more comfortable without the support of his arm, was moving it, but the old man cried out: “Nay, lad, keep it there, keep it there! It makes me feel safe!”

More than once during the night Baxter feared that death had indeed come to him, for he breathed spasmodically, and then seemed to cease altogether. But his wonderful vitality helped him to recuperate, and towards morning he seemed stronger and better. “Baxter,” he whispered as morning began to dawn, “is that the sun?”

“Yes, grandfather.”

“Thank God!” he panted. “I think I can sleep quiet now.”

“That’s right, grandfather.”

“Ay, and Baxter, don’t, for God’s sake, let your soul get like mine. Don’t neglect it, keep it alive!”

“How can I do that, grandfather?” he could not help asking.

“Pray,” whispered the old man. “Pray, and ’appen if you pray a lot you may be able to believe. And then— and then—”

He had held Baxter’s hand tightly while he had been speaking, but now his muscles relaxed, and he sank into a deep, dreamless sleep. But even while he was doing so, the young man heard him whisper three times, and the word he whispered was “Life! life! life!”



## 22. Ruth Townley

BAXTER DID NOT GO to Lancaster's before breakfast when morning came. Instead, as soon as the office was open, he went to the telephone and got into communication with the various heads of departments. "I hope to be with you presently," he informed them, "but unless there is something that needs special attention, I shall not be down until late. My grandfather had rather a bad night— Yes, he is a little better now, thank you, and the doctor, who has just been, gives a good report."

"There is not the slightest reason for you to come down at once," nearly all the managers informed him. "The morning's post has brought nothing out of the ordinary, and we will get into telephonic communication with Manchester and Liverpool as soon as possible."

There was one exception, however. Nehemiah Blackburn, who had charge of the general office, informed him that Miss Townley had not appeared at the usual time.

"Is young Butterworth there?" asked Baxter.

"Oh yes, Mr. Baxter. He's at his new job. From what I can hear, too, he has been behaving better."

"Do you think Miss Townley is not well?" he asked a little anxiously. "You told me yesterday," he added as if in explanation, "that you had sent her away from the office early."

"Yes, I know I did," replied Nehemiah Blackburn, "but I don't think there is anything serious the matter with her."

He rang off just then, and Baxter was left wondering.

Just before eleven o'clock came, Baxter, after having first made sure that his grandfather was better, went to his office.

Here he was met by Nehemiah Blackburn. "I am sorry I have rather serious news for you, Mr. Baxter," he said.

"Serious news!" repeated Baxter anxiously. "What is it?"

"It's that Miss Townley, Mr. Baxter."

"Well, what of her? Is there anything wrong?"

“No, there is nothing wrong with her,” replied Nehemiah. “It’s her mother. I’ve just had word that she’s dead.”

In spite of himself, a sense of relief came into Baxter’s heart. He was afraid when Nehemiah had first spoken that some untoward thing had happened to the girl herself, and although his news was serious enough, his heart beat lighter—at the thought that the girl was well. “Of course you sent word to the house?” he said.

“No, there seemed nothing to say, Mr. Baxter,” replied Blackburn, “except that I was very sorry. A little girl, a neighbor’s child, called about an hour ago to say that Mrs. Townley was dead, but she was off again before I had time to say anything, except that I was sorry.”

Without hesitating a second, Baxter went to the factory garage, and a few minutes later was driving rapidly in the direction of Dixon Street. He hardly knew why he was doing this. Nevertheless, he felt it incumbent upon him. Of course, the neighbors would remark upon his action, but, after all, it was only natural. Ruth Townley was one of his employees, and it would seem heartless on his part not to take any notice of the fact that her mother had died. And yet he could not help asking himself as the car wound its way through a lot of narrow streets whether, if such an experience happened to any of the other girls who worked in the factory, he would have taken any notice of it.

On arriving at the house, he saw that not only had the blinds been drawn, but that at several of the other cottages which stood contiguous the windows were darkened. No response was made to his knock, and when after nearly a minute’s silence he knocked again and no one came, he thought he must have mistaken the house.

He was just on the point of inquiring at the next cottage when the door opened, and Ruth Townley appeared. “I hope you haven’t been waiting long?” she said. There was a dazed look in her eyes. Indeed, she might have been walking in her sleep.

“Only a few seconds, Miss Townley. I did not know until half an hour ago of what had happened to you, and I came to offer you my sympathy, as well as any service I might be able to render.”

“No, I don’t think there is anything,” she replied. She looked at him with a wan smile, and seemed as if she hardly knew what she was saying. “Mother only left me a few hours ago,” she continued. “I had been sitting

up with her all night, and when I knew she was gone, I—I hardly know how I felt. But it's all right, isn't it?"

"Surely," cried Baxter, as he stepped inside the door, "you have not been here alone all this time?"

"Oh, no!" she cried, and again a wan smile came to her lips. "Mother was ill last night, and the neighbors very kindly called to know if they could do anything. Of course, I didn't trouble them, and when they came this morning wanting to know if mother was any better, I had to tell them the truth. They were very kind, and did everything in their power for me. It was they who sent for the doctor and—and other things. You see, I was nearly helpless."

"But surely, Miss Townley," protested Baxter, "you are not alone in the house?"

"Yes, I am. I couldn't bear to have anyone. It was just ghastly, and after the doctor, and the undertaker, and the other people had been, I just drove them away. I wanted to be left alone with mother."

"And you are not afraid?"

"Afraid?" and there was a new light in her eyes. "Afraid of being alone with mother!"

There was such a rebuke in her tones that Baxter could not help apologizing. "I am afraid I said something wrong," he ejaculated.

"Oh, no," she replied; "but your suggestion was so far from the truth that I was sure you didn't understand."

"Anyhow, I am awful sorry for you, Miss Townley. You must be going through a terrible experience, and if it is in my power to help you, I shall be very glad."

"Yes, I shall be very lonely," the girl said. "I wonder if mother will be allowed to come and speak to me? I think God might let her. We were so much to each other," she added.

Baxter was silent. He remembered his own experiences with his grandfather through the night, and wondered what he would be feeling if the old man had died.

"You see," went on the girl, "I know that mother is still alive, and I am sure she would want to come and comfort me, if she were able."

He did not speak; words seemed poor at such-a time. Besides, he could say nothing that would help her. To him, the woman to whom he had spoken not long before had gone away into everlasting blackness.

“I know from what my mother said to me not long before she went,” the girl went on, “that she will be near me. I have that to comfort me, anyhow.”

“Near you!” he repeated.

“Why, of course,” replied the girl with a confident smile. “You knew her but little, did you, and you saw her only a little while when you came? She was very proud and reserved, but she was the most perfect Christian I ever knew. She seldom went to a place of worship; she was afraid. You see, her heart was so weak. But she constantly held communion with her Lord, and she was so sure of Him that she made me feel sure, too. She knew she was going to die,” went on the girl after a little silence, “and I think she wanted to speak to you.”

“Speak to me!” cried Baxter, astonished.

“Yes. I am sure you will forgive me for referring to it, but she seemed delighted last night at what you said.”

“What did I say?” he asked wonderingly.

“You said that my work was appreciated at the office, and that Mr. Blackburn thought very highly of me,” she replied with a smile. “You have no idea how it comforted her. As I told you, she seemed to know she was going to die, and I think that what you said assured her that I should not lose my place. She tried to leave a message for you, too, for she said more than once: ‘Tell Mr. Lancaster—’ But she did not finish the sentence. Still, I think I know what was in her mind.”

“You need not fear about that, Miss Townley,” replied Baxter. “For that matter, I had been thinking a great deal about you before yesterday, and I made up my mind to offer you the position of secretary to Edgar Butterworth’s successor in the South African Department; but there is time enough to think about that. You will need a good long rest after your trouble, and you must go away somewhere.”

“Thank you,” replied the girl quietly, “you are very kind, but I am not sure yet what I shall do. But for the thought of mother, I think I should go back to Cambridge.”

“To Cambridge!” repeated Baxter.

“Yes, we lived there before we came here. Oh, I forgot; you didn’t know. My father was a coach, but owing to his ill-health, he had to give up a lot of his pupils, and when he died—well, you see, there were so many expenses that there was hardly a penny left. Besides, during his last illness he had more than once expressed the wish that mother and I should come to

Lancashire to live if he died. He said that the Lancashire people were the kindest in the world, and—and perhaps you know that his family had Lancashire associations? I don't think mother and I would have come here but for the wish he more than once expressed. You see, my father's slightest wish was law to mother, and that was why we came. But now that both father and mother are gone, I think, perhaps, I may return to Cambridge."

"I hope you won't do that!" cried Baxter.

"I am sure I could get something to do there," the girl said, "and I think I shall be able to visualize father and mother more clearly there than I can here. However, everything seems so confused at present that I can't see my future clearly."

"Promise me this, at all events," cried Baxter, and he spoke almost without thinking; "you will come to me for any help you may need?"

"Why should I?" asked the girl. "I have no claim upon you, and beyond the fact that I am employed by you, I am an absolute stranger to you!"

"Yes, but—" He hardly knew how to finish his sentence. Then he went on: "I feel I owe you a duty, Miss Townley. It was through my carelessness that your salary was decreased after I found out that Butterworth had made himself unpleasant to you. You will at least allow me to rectify that. And may I say something else? You will allow me to make it possible for you to take a holiday, say, in the Lake District, after your painful duties here are done?"

For a minute she seemed like one confused. Evidently she didn't understand him. Then when the truth broke upon her, she said rather hastily: "Certainly not, Mr. Lancaster! I have no claim upon you, and it would be impossible for me to take such help as you offer. All the same, I thank you for coming to see me, and I am sure mother will appreciate it, too." She spoke as though her mother were close to her, and heard all that had been said.

"Your mother!" he repeated.

"Yes, for, of course, she knows, and—and—" A piteous little smile came to her lips at this, and tears welled up in her eyes.

"Won't you allow me to send a car for—the funeral?"

He hated saying the word, but there seemed no help for it. "It will not be the slightest trouble to me," he added. "In fact, I should like to do it."

She thought a minute, and then replied: "No, thank you, Mr. Lancaster. It is very kind of you to think of it—but mother wouldn't like it, neither

should I. Goodbye, and thank you a thousand times for calling.”

He felt himself dismissed, and in the face of that dismissal he could not stay. A minute later he was driving towards the town. At first he could hardly understand it. A girl working on his clerical staff for a few shillings a week had actually had the temerity to dismiss him, Baxter Lancaster, the practical owner of one of the biggest businesses in Lancashire, a business which had world-Wide ramifications, as though he were a junior clerk! It seemed so absurd that he could have laughed aloud. And yet it was right. He knew, yes, and she knew, too, that even at that moment a hundred tongues would be gossiping concerning their meeting, and that if she had accepted any favor from him a number of people would put a bad construction upon it.

When a few minutes later he got nearer to the heart of the town, and saw that a score of factories were emptying themselves, he remembered, too, that it was Saturday, and that it was a half-holiday for nearly all the mill hands.

This reminded him that Ruth Townley’s salary for the week was not yet paid. Yes, he would see that a messenger took it up at once. For a moment he was angry with himself that he had not left it with her when paying his visit; but immediately after he was glad he had not done so.

Yes, he was glad that she had refused to allow him to do what he had in his heart to do. He would, had he been allowed, have acted like a bounder, and wounded her to the quick. He realized that in spite of the humble cottage in which she lived, he could no more take liberties with her than a stranger could with Evelyn Templeton.

A few minutes later he had arranged with Nehemiah Blackburn to send to Ruth Townley’s cottage her week’s salary, and had also instructed Blackburn to assure her that she would not be expected to return to the office until after her mother’s funeral.

“Tell her,” he informed Nehemiah, “as if it came from yourself, that she need not return for a few days.”

“Shall I say you said so?” asked Nehemiah.

“No, don’t mention my name; just act as if it were your own thought.”

Baxter Lancaster did not return to Barons Court until late that afternoon. He knew that the factories were empty, and that almost everyone, including not only the factory hands, but the clerks and secretaries, had left the place.

But he did not seem to heed it. Sitting alone in his own private room, he ruminated over the experiences of the morning.

He did not trouble about lunch. Indeed, he had forgotten that he should have been hungry. Instead, after he had assured himself that his grandfather had practically recovered from the experiences of the night, he gave himself up to thinking about what had happened.

He remembered that Ruth Townley's mother, according to her daughter's report, had seemed to have no doubts about her well-being after death. She did not say so in so many words. Nevertheless, that was the feeling left with Baxter, and he asked himself if, supposing old Amos had died, he, Baxter, would have thoughts similar to those of Ruth Townley...

Why should he bother? He was only twenty-eight, and, in the natural course of events, would have perhaps fifty years of life before him! Why, then, should he trouble about what happened after death?

But he did trouble. After all, death was bound to come sometime, and, in the course of nature, it could only be a few years, at the most, before his grandfather left him. Was there anything after the breath left the body? Was there a life beyond? Was there a God Almighty who cared, or was everything to be an everlasting blackness and a nothingness?

Presently he heard the sound of footsteps echoing through the empty offices. At first he thought of robbers, but immediately afterward called to mind that it would be only one of the watchmen making sure that everything was right. Then, having locked his door, he went into the factory garage, and having taken out his car, drove home.

"Your grandfather is a lot better," Chadwick greeted him. "He told me he wanted to see you immediately you came."

"Baxter," the old man said as he entered the room, "I shall be up directly after tea."

"Are you sure you are well enough?" he asked anxiously.

"Ay, I am sure. The Lord has given me a new lease of life, Baxter. I feel it with every breath I draw. But I wur just on the point of going last night, my lad. That felly had marked me down."

"What are you talking about, grandfather? You were only dreaming!"

"Nay, I wurn't. That felly Death and th' other chap who came into the room, had marked me down. But God Almighty has given me another chance."

"Another chance!" repeated Baxter.

“Ay, I feel it beating in me now.”

“Feel what beating in you now?”

“Life,” cried the old man. “Life! life! life! Ay, you don’t know how I have been praying since Eliza Stuttard died, and the Lord is answering my prayers, Baxter.”

There was such a glad tone in his voice that even although he might not believe a word he said, Baxter could not help rejoicing in old Amos’s new-found happiness, and he wondered whether this happiness would be permanent. He had heard of people who immediately before death becoming especially bright and strong, and he feared lest something like this were happening to his grandfather. As soon as possible, therefore, he sent for Dr. Black, and asked him to give him a special report of the old man’s condition.

Old Amos was a little indignant at Dr. Black’s visit, but being an old friend, and possessed of a considerable amount of tact, the doctor was able to do what Baxter desired without arousing any suspicion.

“I don’t understand him,” the doctor assured Baxter immediately after the examination.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean this. Almost ever since the fete I’ve been greatly troubled about your grandfather. His pulse has been getting weaker and weaker, and his heart has day by day been beating less strongly. In fact, I have more than once had it in my mind to tell you that he was rapidly breaking up.”

“Well?” queried Baxter.

“A wonderful change has come over him,” replied the doctor. “In many ways he seems like that old king in the Bible, the clock of whose life was put back a number of years. As far as one can see now, he might live until he is a hundred.”

“Baxter,” said old Amos to his grandson on the morning following the doctor’s visit, “it’s Sunday today, isn’t it?”

The young man was sitting in his grandfather’s bedroom as he spoke.

“You can hear the church bells if you listen,” he said.

“So you can. And look here, Baxter, why don’t you go and hear that felly this morning?”

“What fellow?”

“That Wallace felly.”

“It’s not in my line,” replied Baxter.



Old Amos sighed. "Nay, we have neither troubled churches nor chapels much, have we? Except for the morning after Eliza Stuttard's funeral when we went to St. George's Independent Chapel. I scarcely remember you ever seeing the inside of a place of worship. Go today, Baxter."

Baxter shook his head.

"But for my being so poorly the night before last," exclaimed old Amos stoutly, "I'd go myself; I would for sure. 'Appen by next Sunday I'll be well enough. Wilt'a go with me, lad?"

"What, to hear Stephen Wallace?"

"Ay. He's a grand lad, and although I suppose the chapel will be almost empty, I am told he is the best preacher in the town."

"All right," exclaimed Baxter with a laugh. "If you are well enough to go next Sunday I'll go with you."

Old Amos expressed himself as delighted at this, but during the next few days he seemed so grim and taciturn that Baxter felt he had been precipitate in imagining that any change had come over the old man.

Then something happened.

Mrs. Townley was buried on the Tuesday afternoon following the Saturday morning on which Baxter had visited the house. He did not go to the funeral, although he was solely tempted to do so. He imagined, however, that Ruth Townley would regard it as a liberty on his part to intrude himself. He sent Nehemiah Blackburn, however, to represent him, and on Nehemiah's return to the office after the funeral had taken place, although he could scarcely have told why, asked him for particulars.

"There were but few people there," Nehemiah informed him. "You see," he added, "Mrs. Townley was only a stranger, and that lass has kept herself to herself, so to speak."

"Mrs. Townley was a churchwoman, and, I suppose, there would be a church service?" he asked.

"Nay, I don't know," replied Nehemiah.

"Why, didn't the rector officiate?"

"Nay, old William Whitham, the town missionary, took the service. Both mother and daughter dearly loved that old man, and I have more than once heard Miss Ruth say that he more reminded her of Jesus Christ than any man in Baronstown. Miss Ruth will be in her place tomorrow morning," added Nehemiah.

“Surely not!” exclaimed Baxter. “I told you especially to tell her that there was no need for her to come this week.”

“I did tell her,” replied Nehemiah, “but she said she was coming.”

On the Thursday morning, however, only a few minutes after Baxter had entered his office, Nehemiah entered the room. “Ruth Townley is dangerously ill,” he exclaimed.

Baxter turned quickly in his office chair. “What’s that?” he asked.

Nehemiah repeated his message. “I thought she looked very pale at the funeral,” he added. “She seemed nothing better than a corpse; her skin was as white as paper, and there was a look in her eyes such as I hope I shall never see again. However, she seemed so calm and collected that I hoped she would have been able to turn up here at her usual time, although I told her that there was no need that she should. But from what I could gather from the neighbor’s child who came here this morning, she fainted immediately on her return home from the funeral. It seems that they sent for the doctor immediately, who, after having examined her, gave a very serious report. From what the girl says, she is very bad this morning; very bad indeed.”

Baxter didn’t speak; he couldn’t. He knew of no particular reason why he should be troubled about Ruth Townley’s illness, but he was, and he looked at Nehemiah Blackburn as though waiting for him to say more.

“From what the girl told me, the doctor doesn’t think she will get over it,” said Blackburn.

“What doctor?”

“Dr. Black,” was the reply.

“Not get over it?”

“Nay,” replied the other. “From what the girl said Dr. Black went there early this morning, and he told the neighbor who sat up with Miss Ruth through the night that they must expect the worst.”

Baxter did not ask any more questions. Instead, having dismissed Nehemiah Blackburn, he threw himself in his office chair, and buried his face in his hands.

## 23. Great News

HOW LONG HE SAT ALONE he did not know. For that matter, he did not care. Why it was so he could not tell, but as far as he was concerned, the world seemed to have come to an end. Not far away the great Lancaster factories were working at full blast. Trade was bad in the country, but it did not seem to affect Lancaster's. Immediately around him telephone bells were ringing, typewriters were clicking, while the Lancaster staff, with its worldwide ramifications, seemed deeply immersed in the business of the day.

But the owner of it paid no heed to it. He had just heard that one of his typists, a stranger to the town, was ill; perhaps dying, and as far as he was concerned, nothing else mattered.

“Great God!” he exclaimed.

Evelyn Templeton did not matter; Peggy Edgecumbe, as far as he was concerned, did not exist. His whole life was centered in the girl of whom he knew but little, and who, according to the news he had just heard, was dying.

What could he do? Never did he realize his helplessness as now, and yet

—

It came to him in a flash. Ruth Townley was all the world to him. He had had no thought of her, save as an employee, as one of the typists engaged by the firm. Of course, she was superior to the others, and, in a way he could not understand, he had become interested in her. He had also, on hearing of her mother's death, gone to the cottage in which she lived, and tried to offer words of condolence on her loss. But he had not realized what she meant to him until now.

Yes, she was all the world to him. Life without her would be a great haggard misery. It would be worse. It would be hell.

And she was lying alone, dying in that cottage for which her mother had paid five shillings a week as rent; while he—

He rushed to the telephone, and a minute later was connected with Dr. Black's surgery. “Is that you, Black?”

“Yes. I was just going out; if you had been a minute later you would have missed me. What is it? Your grandfather isn’t ill again, is he?”

He tried to tell him why he had rung him up, but somehow the words wouldn’t come. “Tell me about Miss Ruth Townley,” he ejaculated presently. “I have only just heard about her illness.”

“Yes, I am just going there. I went early this morning, and found her in a very critical condition. She may be dead by now. I don’t know.”

Dr. Black had a huge practice; so huge that he had no particular interest in many of his cases, and he, in the present instance, seemed hard and unfeeling.

His words cut Baxter Lancaster’s heart like a knife. “You must not let her die!” he gasped.

“Of course, I will do everything I can for her,” he replied, and, to Baxter, his words seemed almost careless.

“You must leave no stone unturned,” the young man persisted. “Don’t spare any expense! Do whatever is possible for her!”

Dr. Black thought he understood. He knew Miss Townley was an employee at Lancaster’s, and he imagined that Baxter was saying just what he would have said about any of his staff similarly circumstanced. “I’ll do my best, Baxter,” Dr. Black assured him.

“Yes, and please remember that I meant what I said when I told you to spare no expense. If it is necessary, send for a specialist from Manchester, or Liverpool, or London.”

“I am afraid a specialist would be of no use,” was the reply. “Anyhow, I am going there immediately, and I will let you know.”

“Do,” commanded Baxter. “You say you are going there at once? Then, look here, go to the nearest call office directly you have visited her, and let me know how she is.”

Dr. Black drove straight to Dixon Street. He knew no particular reason why Baxter should be so excited. Still, he would do as he had told him, and accordingly, directly he had paid his visit to Ruth Townley, he made his way to a call office. “I think she is slightly better,” the doctor informed him. “No marked change has taken place. Of course, her condition is still critical.”

“What did you say? What’s the matter with her?”

“It’s difficult to say. To tell you the truth, I am afraid it’s a kind of paralysis. I scarcely like to mention it, but I am afraid the girl has been

starving. At any rate, she hasn't had enough nutritious food for a long time.

It is evident, too, that her mother was very dear to her., I am told that she fairly worshipped her. Thus her death coming while she was in this condition, was too much for her, and as a consequence—"

"What!" exclaimed Baxter in terror-stricken tones.

"Of course it's not your fault, my dear fellow; you couldn't help it. How could you know that she hadn't had enough to eat?"

"Does she retain her faculties?" asked Baxter. He didn't at all know what he was saying, but the question came to him and he uttered it.

But, in any case, it did not matter. Evidently the doctor did not understand, and did not give a coherent answer.

A few minutes later he was on his way to Dixon Street. He could not, he simply could not remain in his office while the girl who, he realized, was a thousand times dearer to him than life itself, was lying at the point of death not far away. He must see to it that everything was done that could be done.

When he reached Ruth Townley's cottage four neighbors nearly filled what was called "the room," which was immediately behind the front window.

"Ay," one of them replied in answer to his question, "'oo's varry bad."

"Is anyone with her?" asked Baxter.

"Ay, Mrs. Grimshaw is theer, 'oo's bin with 'er all th' night."

"Miss Townley is very ill?"

"Ay, 'oo's varry ill. Would yo' like to see 'er?" the woman asked.

"May I?" almost gasped the young man.

"Aw'll spaik to Mrs. Grimshaw right away," was the reply.

A minute later a kindly neighbor came downstairs. "Coom up," she commanded, on seeing Baxter.

"You are sure it will be all right?"

"Doctor never said owt agin it," replied the woman.

Baxter made his way up the narrow staircase, and a minute later stood by Ruth Townley's bed. But she knew nothing of his presence; she was far away in the realms of unconsciousness.

How thin and pale she looked! She appeared so weak and emaciated that only a hair's breadth seemed to exist between her and the great unknown.

Baxter did not speak; he was unable to utter a word. Instead, he stood looking at her with a feeling of utter helplessness in his heart.

"Hark!" said Mrs. Grimshaw. "Her mind is wandering."

Baxter heard the girl's whispering voice: "It's all right, mother," he heard her say, "I'll soon be with you. What's that? You are very happy where you are—I am glad of that. But I knew you would be; you are so good, and God is so good."

The girl ceased speaking. For that matter, she seemed to cease breathing.

"Ay, she is gone!" cried Mrs. Grimshaw. "Poor lass, she is gone!"

Baxter Lancaster's heart became dead, and it seemed to him as though the sun, which was shining outside, had gone black. "Is she dead?" he gasped.

"Ay, she is—Nay, she isn't though, she is breathin' agean now I Ay, I shall be glad when that nurse comes!"

"Is a nurse coming?" queried Baxter.

"Ay. Dr. Black came back again after he wur here this morning, and he towd me he had sent to th' 'ospital for a nurse. She should be 'ere any time now."

Even while the woman spoke, there was a sound of whispering voices downstairs, which portended that someone new had come upon the scene.

A minute later a woman in nurse's garb appeared on the threshold of the bedroom door. "You are Mr. Baxter Lancaster?" exclaimed the nurse. "Dr. Black called at the hospital a few minutes ago. He said he was acting on your instructions."

"That's right," he replied. "Do all you can, nurse; let her lack for nothing. Whatever delicacy she needs, get it! You understand, don't you?"

"Yes, I understand," replied the nurse, who was said to be a wise woman.

But she didn't understand at all; neither did either of the other kindly neighbors who waited downstairs. To them, Baxter Lancaster was only a thoughtful employer, who had become cognizant of the patient's condition, and wanted to give such instructions as might be helpful for her recovery.

A minute later he was in the street again, but he did not drive towards the town. Instead, he headed his car towards the country. He wanted to be away from the smoke, and the grime, and the clamor of the world, and when at length he had covered many miles and had reached that part of the country which was away from the manufacturing zone, he stopped his car by the roadside, and found his way to a copse where he was unseen and unheard.

Baxter Lancaster was no longer an incarnate yawn. Neither, for that matter, was he any longer a rather thoughtful and well-read young fellow, who was noted for his gift of self-repression. Rather, he was almost mad. He felt, indeed, that if Ruth Townley died he would go mad, for life without her would be a mockery, and worse than a mockery.

He saw her again as he saw her lying wan and helpless an hour or so before. He heard her feeble breathing; he heard the whispering tones of her voice as she fancied she talked with her mother. "O God! O God! O God!" he cried.

It was a prayer, but he did not know it. He had said a a hundred times since the fête that he had no need of God. For that matter, he doubted whether there was a God at all, and had said that what men called God was either a figment of the imagination, or an abstraction, an Eternal Force which could be of no service to anyone. But now, far out in the country as he was, and no sound save the whispering of the wind through the tree-tops around him, he had, unconsciously, uttered his cry which was also a prayer.

He looked around him. Where was he? He wasn't at all sure. He knew that he had left the smoke zone, and had come out in the heart of the country, but whether he was in Lancashire, or Yorkshire, or Cumberland, he did not know. He didn't care, for that matter.

But he was glad he was alone. He was sufficiently far out in the country as to be away from watching eyes and listening ears. The air was pure, too; pure and clean; and, in a way, he was thankful for it. Of what use was all his money? Of what use was anything?

Again he looked around him. In the near distance his car was standing on the grass beside the road, while he was alone in this little bit of woodland.

Why was he there? He remembered now. He had left Ruth Townley's bedside while the nurse from the hospital had come to nurse her. Nurse Singleton she was called. He remembered seeing her somewhere—where he didn't know.

Again he uttered the words which had passed his lips a minute or so before. "O God! O God! O God!" he cried.

He wondered if there was a God.

He looked around him savagely; he felt he was going mad. "If there isn't a God," he cried aloud, "there ought to be! If there isn't a God to hear me, then— then—!"

A second later he had thrown himself upon the ground, while hoarse sobs shook him.

He was no longer the circumspect, correctly behaved Baxter Lancaster, but a half-savage man in agony. He was crying out to Something, he did not know what, for help and succor.

Baxter Lancaster was not a man who had frittered away his heart in dozens of flirtations. As a matter of fact, he had never loved before; and now that love had really come, it had enveloped his whole being, and gripped him like a vice. Ruth Townley satisfied his every need; filled his being with new hopes, new joys, new satisfactions!

But she was ill, dying. Perhaps by now she was dead, and he could do nothing, nothing! "O God! O God! O God!" he cried again. "Save her, save her for me!"

But no answer came to him, and it seemed as though the whispering winds among the trees were mocking him.

It was not until late in the evening that Baxter Lancaster again found his way to Barons Court, and if anyone had asked him how he had spent the day he would have, found a difficulty in replying. For that matter, everything seemed confused and unreal, and all this was because he had suddenly awakened to the fact that there was but one person in all the world for him, and that she, according to the information that had been given him, lay dying in a little cottage in Dixon Street.

But Baxter told no one of his discovery; it was too sacred to talk about. Besides, everything was so hopeless that he dared not utter a word. All the same, the first thing he did on returning to Baronstown was to telephone Dr. Black concerning his patient's condition, and to give instructions that he was to be constantly informed as to how she was progressing.

Days passed away and there was nothing to record.

When Sunday morning came Baxter was not a little surprised to see old Amos in the breakfast-room. "Art 'a ready, lad?" asked the old man.

"Ready for what?"

"Why, you remember! It is several days ago now that I axed you whether you would go with me to St. George's Independent Chapel this morning and hear young Stephen Wallace. You promised me you would, too."

Baxter had just left the telephone. He had been speaking with Dr. Black concerning Ruth Townley, and had learnt that her condition was still



critical. “She doesn’t seem any worse,” explained the doctor, “but she puzzles me.”

“In what way?”

“I see no reason why she shouldn’t get better,” explained the doctor; “but she doesn’t. Perhaps I am wrong, though. She has regained consciousness, and is cognizant of all that goes on around her; but she is perfectly indifferent to everything.”

“But she will get better, won’t she?” asked Baxter.

“I shouldn’t like to say that,” replied the doctor. “For that matter, unless some great change comes she will die. It’s a mystery to me that she’s alive now. You see, she was almost absolutely without strength when her mother died, owing to lack of good food. And since— Well, owing to your kindness, it has been made possible for her to have every luxury. But the nurse reports that she can get her to eat nothing.”

“You are, of course, going again today, doctor?” and a careful listener would have discovered anguish in his voice.

“Yes, I am going at noon.”

“Well, do everything possible,” pleaded Baxter.

As may be imagined, therefore, the young man was in a curious frame of mind when old Amos spoke to him concerning going to church that morning. But he had always kept faith with the old man, and although his mind and heart were torn with agony that morning, he would still keep faith with him.

“If only I was sure that there was anything in it,” he reflected. “If I could only believe that there was a God Who heard, I should love to go. But there is nothing; everything of that nature seems like a great blank wall.”

“Art ’a ready, lad?” cried old Amos, a few minutes before half-past ten. There was eagerness in the old man’s voice, while a bright light shone from his old eyes. “The car is at the door,” he added.

“All right, grandfather, I will be with you in a second.” And then, as if commenting on the old man’s appeal, he said to himself: “But it’s no use; not a particle of use!”

Old Amos never dreamt of the battle his grandson was fighting that morning as he made his way to the entrance door of the old house. As we have said, Baxter had hugged what seemed to him a hopeless secret to his heart, and old Amos, never dreaming of the thoughts his grandson was thinking, got into the car with the agility of a boy.

“It’s a grand morning, Baxter lad,” exclaimed the old man. “It’s summat like the first of June.”

Baxter did not speak. In a way he could not explain, he felt himself to be a different man from what he was on the first of June, and it seemed to him that even the brightness of the morning mocked him.

St. George’s Independent Chapel was but thinly attended that morning, and although Baxter thought he detected a look of expectancy and eagerness in the eyes of more than one of the deacons, he could not help feeling what a mockery it was that a man of Stephen Wallace’s ability should be throwing his life away in a place like Baronstown.

“Come this way, Amos lad,” exclaimed old Jonas Beswick, as Baxter and his grandfather stood inside the door of the vestibule. “You said you meant to be here, so I kept a whole pew for you and Baxter.”

Baxter could have laughed as he followed his grandfather down the aisle of the church. It was almost church time, and the edifice was fine and imposing, yet only a sprinkling of people had gathered there.

“Christianity is just a played-out fallacy, that’s all,” Baxter made a mental comment. “It is going the way of all the other religions.”

And yet, almost in spite of himself, he bowed his head as if in prayer as he entered the pew, and reflected that even although religions came and went, religion remained.

“A man cannot do without God,” he reflected, “and Christianity seems to be the highest representation of God.”

But philosophic musings did not help him. He remembered that a mile or two away Ruth Townley was said to be dying, and that the doctor was not able to give any hope of her recovery.

Oh, if only he could be sure of God! If he could only be sure that Someone knew of the great longings born in his heart, and that He had sufficient care for him to help him.

“O God! O God! O God!” he cried within himself.

And yet there was something helpful in the church, after all. Very few people were there, far less than a hundred all told. But yes, he could not help admitting it, there was something helpful in the atmosphere. The man at the organ was an artist. He was more than an artist; his soul entered into the music he was discoursing. The organ was a fine one, too, and the tones were full of melody and inspiration.

“O rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He will give thee thy heart’s desire.”

He could hear the words, although no words were uttered, and, in a way, they soothed him.

Yes, in a way, if Christianity wasn’t true, it ought to be true. Yes, it ought to be true, and in a way, deeper than his thoughts, he felt that it was true. True in essence; true in everything that mattered. And yet——

He saw old Ned Stuttard come into the church, and enter his pew. The sight did him good. There was a new light in the old man’s eyes, and more than light. It was the assurance, of power, of victory.

The organ stopped, and his friend, Stephen Wallace, entered the pulpit. He wondered, as he had wondered the last time he was there when he saw the young minister bow his head in prayer, whether it were real to him. And presently when Stephen Wallace rose from his knees, his heart gave a great leap, a leap which he could not explain. In the young minister’s eyes was a look which told of infinite things, infinite hope, infinite assurance, infinite consciousness.

“Yes,” Baxter said to himself, “Stephen Wallace has got hold of something great; something which gives light to his eyes, and illumines his being.”

Baxter never had anything but a vague remembrance of what took place afterwards, until nearly the end of the service. He told himself that nothing was real; that nothing was taking place beyond the ordinary. And yet he knew that something out of the ordinary had happened, although what it was he could not tell.

Hymn followed hymn, scripture followed scripture, prayer followed prayer; just as had been the case during the last fifty Sundays. And yet, as far as he was concerned, Baxter knew there was a difference. Surely something out of the ordinary was taking place. Some great Omnipotent Presence was there revealing Himself! And yet it was all vague and unreal.

“My dear friends,” he heard Stephen Wallace saying. “Some of you have for weeks been going through deep waters, and you have felt like saying with the poet who wrote this psalm, ‘ All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me.’ Some of you are in the deep waters still, and they are as black as hell and as cold as death. As you can’t see any light; perhaps God seems to mock you.

"I have good news for you; great news for you. I who am speaking tell you, not as mere hearsay, but as something of which I am sure, yes, as sure as I am of my own existence, that God lives, that God is loving you, that God is waiting to give you your heart's desire.

"Yes, I know what you are thinking about. Some of you have been starving your souls, starving them so long that they are nearly dead. Some of you are in danger of destroying by unbelief, by neglect, by mockery, the most precious thing that even God Almighty can give to His children. But I tell you this: God loves you, and is waiting to reveal Himself unto you."

Stephen Wallace paused for a few seconds, and then seemed to be saying what had only just come to him.

"You used to be sure of an after life: sure that you would meet your loved ones again, hold them in your arms, and have intercourse with them. That is dead now; but you need not be afraid. God is greater than our fears, and He is waiting to give you your heart's desire. Yes, yes, waiting to reveal Himself now; waiting to give you the great consciousness that He gives to all who really desire Him." It was at that moment that Baxter felt a thrill pass through his being. He had become almost unconscious as to where he was, and had not thought of his grandfather, who was, at that moment, sitting by his side. But as Stephen Wallace ceased speaking, old Amos Lancaster rose to his feet and gave a great shout. "Hallelujah!" he cried. "I've got it, Ned; I've got it again! Praise the Lord!" Then he fell on his knees, and sobbed like a child.

## 24. A Miracle!

FOR MORE THAN A MINUTE Baxter did not fully appreciate what had taken place. He realized what Stephen Wallace had just said; realized something, too, of the influences which surrounded him. He had also heard his grandfather's exultant shout. But it meant nothing to him. Of course in a way he was glad, for his grandfather's sake, that light had come to him; but it had no meaning to him, Baxter Lancaster. Then he turned and looked at his grandfather who was kneeling by his side, while tears rolled down his withered old face. "Praise the Lord, Baxter!" he heard the old man say. "God has forgiven me, lad! He has forgiven me! I am noan dead; I am alive!"

The young man made no sign. Why should he? Of course he was annoyed that his grandfather should make such an exhibition of himself, and remembered that in two or three hours' time it would be the talk of the town. He asked himself what he should say on the following day when he went to the factory and the offices, and the people should remark upon old Amos's behavior. He knew that Stephen Wallace had ceased preaching and that the service would soon be closed. He heard him announce the hymn, and he thought he was on the point of reading the first verse of the hymn, but he did not. Instead, he read a line from the Bible which was printed as a heading to the hymn. "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Baxter remembered that the words were from the Book of Job; that they were supposed to have been uttered by a man who would today be called Pagan, and yet, to him, they had a significance which was more than ordinary.

"I KNOW that my Redeemer liveth."

There was confidence in them, and more than confidence. There was a sublime triumph, a knowledge of eternal victory. And Ruth Townley was lying dying I Well, what then? He had almost unconsciously risen from his seat as the people rose to sing the closing hymn. But he did not try to sing himself; at least he was honest enough not to sing what he did not believe. Then he looked at his grandfather, and saw that the old man, while the tears

were trickling down his face, was almost shouting the hymn of triumph. The same light of joy was in his eyes, while the same consciousness of victory was expressed by his every look and note. Almost with a sense of shame, Baxter tried to get his grandfather out of the church quickly; but in vain. The old man rushed to Ned Stuttard and grasped him by the hand. "I've got it, Ned; I've got it" he shouted.

"You chap said when I wur here before that my soul, was atrophied, but it's noan atrophied! I can feel I am alive, and bless the Lord, I shall see my owd lass again!"

Baxter paid little attention to what happened in the vestibule. He knew his grandfather had arranged for Ned Stuttard to come and visit him at Barons Court that night. Knew, too, that when Stephen Wallace came and shook hands with his grandfather as he sat in the car, that the old man had pleaded with the young minister to come and see him right soon, and although he was pleased that Wallace had promised to come up to dinner on the a following night, he was almost unaware of what he had said.

"Home, Stevens," he had said to the chauffeur, as he took his seat by his grandfather's side. And then not another word had passed his lips until they reached Barons Court.

He had no distinct remembrance of what took place during lunch-time. He [knew that his grandfather spoke to him joyously and with great assurance concerning his knowledge of meeting his grandmother again, but he himself had paid but little attention. His heart seemed to have withered up; everything in life seemed an insoluble puzzle, a meaningless mockery.

When luncheon was over he left the house and went into the park. "I must drive all this rot out of my mind," he reflected. "What's the good of thinking what's come to grandfather? The old man is *non compos mentis*; his thinking powers are dead, and—and— But he is happy. Great God, if I were only as happy! And he is sure of God; sure he will meet grandmother again, and—"

He tried to drive the thought from him; tried to think that he didn't care anything about Ruth Townley, or whether she lived or died. But he knew it was in vain; knew that he would never cease caring while a breath or a pulse remained.

He remembered what the doctor had said to him earlier that morning; remembered that he seemed to have little hope that Ruth would ever get better.

“O God!” he cried out in agony, “be real to me!— Let me know that Thou art!—Let me be sure of it!—Let me be sure that Thou wilt listen to my cry, and that Thou wilt restore her to life!”

The words escaped him in gasps, and he could hardly recognize the tones of his own voice. What was the use of praying? What was the use of hoping? What was the use of believing?

But he couldn't help praying. He could not help longing that God would reveal Himself.

“O God! God! God!” he cried out again. “Speak to me! Let me be sure that Thou art listening to me! Let me know that Thou wilt restore little Ruth to me!”

He stopped suddenly. What was it that had happened to him? Nothing had happened. He was alone in the park among the trees he had known from boyhood. He heard the birds chirping as they had chirped in the summertime through the long years. He caught sight of the hills which lay beyond the town, and which today, being Sunday, were sufficiently clear for him to see. And there was nothing more.

But there was something more. Something had happened to him; something had spoken to him. He was sure of it. He had heard no words, but Something had spoken, Something! Great God, what was it?

Then like a mad man he rushed to the garage and started the ignition of his car.

A minute later he was driving towards Dixon Street.

On arriving there, he went straight to the house where Ruth Townley lay, and knocked at the door.

A woman who lived two or three doors away came and opened it. “How is Miss Townley?” he asked.

“I reckon she is just the same,” was the reply. “It was just after dinner when I came, and I have heard nothing since. Won't you go up?” she added. “The nurse will be there.”

Evidently there was nothing strange to the woman in the thought of his going into the sick-room. She had heard that Baxter Lancaster had not only provided a day nurse, but a night nurse, and while, naturally, she wondered at the reason for such attention, she knew nothing of it. The owner of Lancaster's had never paid Ruth Townley any particular attention, and hence malicious gossip was not indulged in.

“How is your patient, nurse?” he asked, on reaching the top of the stairs.

The nurse was just on the point of coming out of the bedroom, and while she looked surprised at seeing Baxter, she did not remark on it. "She is very ill, Mr. Lancaster."

"Worse than ordinary?"

"Yes. I don't think she will last long. We can't do anything more for her now," added the nurse. "Won't you go in? I have to go downstairs now, but I will be back in a minute."

He felt like contradicting her hopeless words; they were out of accord with something which was surging in his own heart. But he paid no seeming heed to her, and entered the room.

The girl was lying like one dead, except for the slight quiver of her lips, and that he thought he saw her bosom rising and falling.

Her eyes were closed, and her face was deathly pale; as pale, indeed, as that of a corpse. No wonder that, at first, he thought she was dead!

He went close to her and looked down upon her. But she gave no sign. Evidently she did not know he was there. The sight of her thin, emaciated face, and her utter helplessness aroused him to anger, and he knew he had never loved her as he loved her now.

And he was utterly helpless; he could do nothing!

A strange light came into his eyes, and he lifted his hand towards Heaven. "If you are the God Wallace talked about this morning," he said in a hoarse whisper, "you will save her. If you don't, you are a mocker!"

He didn't know at all what he was saying, and meaningless as his words seemed to be, they appeared to be an escape valve for his feelings.

Had she heard? Her face did not look so much like death as it had when he entered the room, and surely there was a quivering of the eyelids! "O God, save her! O God, make her well make her well!"

Whether he formulated the words or not he did not know, but he did know that this was the great desire of his heart.

He bent over her, and so close was his face to hers that he touched her with his lips. "Ruth, my darling," he whispered, "I love you, love you with all my life, all my being; and God is going to make you well! Do you hear?"

For answer a little fluttering sigh passed her lips; but she did not open her eyes, neither did she give any sign that she knew of his presence.

"Ruth, I love you," he repeated, "and you are going to get better! You are going to get better from this hour, from this minute I—I didn't believe



in God, but I do now; and He is going to make you well!”

He was only half conscious that he had said what he had said. If anyone had told him while on his way to Dixon Street that he would have uttered such words, either he would have been madly angry, or he would have believed himself to be losing his senses. But now it all seemed natural enough.

He heard footsteps on the stairs, and, unconsciously, he stood back from the bed.

The nurse entered the room. “The doctor was here just before lunch,” she informed him. “He doesn’t hold out any hope.”

He turned to the door, but did not speak a word.

A minute later he was in the street.

The nurse went to the window, and saw him enter his car. Then a puzzled look came into her eyes. “Why did he come?” she wondered. “Why did he act so strangely?”

She turned to her patient. “She looks a better color!” she murmured to herself. “Yes, dear,” this to Ruth, “it’s time for you to take your medicine. Can you take it now?”

Ruth Townley made no movement, except to give a sign that she would do as the nurse asked her.

A minute later she appeared to be sleeping peacefully.

“She certainly is a better color, and she seems to be breathing more naturally,” she reflected, as she watched her patient half an hour later.

Yes, there was certainly a better look on Ruth Townley’s face. It was still terribly pale, but it did not look so much like death as it had done two hours before.

“Yes, dear, how are you?” the nurse said, putting her ear close to the patient’s mouth.

“I am better,” replied the girl. “I am, really.”

“That’s right” and the nurse adopted the usual sick-room tones.

“Yes, I am better, I am stronger. Nurse, has anything happened?”

“Why, dear?” asked the nurse.

“I feel as though something has happened,” whispered the sick girl. “Has anybody been here?”

“The doctor was here before lunch,” replied the nurse, and—

“Yes, yes, I remember all about that. But since? Has anybody been here since?”

The nurse hesitated. She was not quite sure whether Dr. Black would be pleased at being told that she had admitted Mr. Baxter Lancaster. And yet, after all, why not? There was not the slightest impropriety in such an act! Ruth Townley was one of the Lancaster staff, and it was through Baxter Lancaster's generosity that she and the night nurse were employed. "Mr. Baxter Lancaster was here a little more than an hour ago," she replied. "He came to inquire after you."

"Did he come here—in the room, I mean?"

Again the nurse hesitated. "He was very anxious about you," she said presently, "and Mrs. Sutcliffe told him to come up. I had to go down for a minute or two—"

"Did he stay long?" interrupted Ruth Townley.

"Not more than a minute. Why do you ask?"

But the sick girl did not reply. She remembered something which she did not wish to reveal to the other; something she wished to think about alone.

"It was very kind of Mr. Lancaster to call, wasn't it?" the nurse said. "It's not every great gentleman who would come to see one of his work people who happened to be ill! Or," and there was a curious look in the nurse's eyes as she asked the question, "has he some special interest in you?"

"He has scarcely ever spoken to me," replied the girl.

Nevertheless, when the nurse left the room again, a glad light came into her eyes, and a happy smile wreathed her lips. "I knew when he came, and when he left," she thought to herself. "I believe he kissed me, too. Anyhow, I know he told me he loved me, and that God was going to make me well!"

There must have been great comfort in the girl's reflections, for her improvement was almost miraculous. Indeed she partook of tea with an appetite, and told the nurse she felt hungry.

That night, just after ten o'clock, Baxter Lancaster was sitting in his snuggery alone. Old Amos had just gone to bed. He had tried, hours before, to persuade Baxter to go to St. George's Independent Church again; but to this Baxter would not consent. Instead, he remained in the house, and although the afternoon and evening were fine, nothing could persuade him to go out-of-doors.

"If he doesn't ring me up within the next five minutes," he reflected, "I'll ring him up." Then he added aloud: "He's always spoken to me every

night before eight o'clock since Thursday, and told me how matters were progressing. I wonder now—I wonder—”

The telephone bell rang, and with excited footsteps he rushed into the room where the instrument stood. “Hallo!” he shouted.

“Is that Baxter Lancaster?” a voice came back in reply.

“Speaking! Is that you, Black?”

“Yes. I have just come from Dixon Street. I thought you would like to know.”

“Well?” He could not altogether keep out the quiver from his voice.

“What have you been doing?” and he heard Dr. Black laugh.

“Doing? What do you mean?”

“Someone or something has performed a miracle,” replied Dr. Black. “That girl Townley is going to get better.”

Baxter didn't at all remember what was said after that. In fact, he didn't listen. He had some idea that the doctor gave him some information about what the nurse said, and about his own impressions; but what he told him only confirmed the news he had first uttered.

A few minutes later Baxter Lancaster was behaving in a very strange fashion. He was out in the park alone, and he was shouting like a man bereft of his senses. He knew that his grandfather, who had made such an exhibition of himself at St. George's Independent Chapel that morning, was neither so foolish nor so excited as he.

“She is going to get better!” he cried, remembering the doctor's words. “She has improved already out of all recognition, and, and— Oh, thank God I thank God!”

Yes, a miracle had happened as truly as that any miracle had taken place in Palestine in the days before the New Testament was written.

Baxter Lancaster laughed aloud in his joy. He shouted with gladness, just as if he were a boy again.

“O God, I thank Thee!” he cried.

And yet, in a way, he was the same Baxter Lancaster still. He knew that when he went to the factory and the offices on the following morning he would be reserved and critical. In all probability, too, he would be altogether silent in regard to Ruth Townley. But that did not matter. A great joy was surging up in his heart; a joy which no words could describe and no music make known.

No, he had not the slightest doubt about it; God had spoken to him. He could not explain how—he didn't want to. If he could have explained it, it would somehow have seemed poorer, less wonderful.

He called to mind how he had gone to the Independent Chapel in the morning, and listened while Wallace had delivered his message to the people. He remembered, too, how he had felt a strange influence at work, which at length affected his old grandfather. He had been almost angry at the time, even although old Amos had evidently entered into a new joy; a joy which had destroyed all doubt and sorrow...

But he had been very silent through lunch-time. He had wondered whether his grandfather had retained his faculties, and whether his experiences were real. Then he, Baxter, had gone out into the park alone. O God, how miserable he had been! What a ghastly confusion everything had appeared to be in, and how he felt like cursing the Almighty to His face

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Then, he did not know how or why, but something came to him; something indescribable, something which made his past life seem puny and worthless; something which gave him hope, victory, in spite of himself. And he had rushed to the garage, and driven to Dixon Street. And then—Great God, it was wonderful!

“Is that you, Baxter?” It was old Amos's voice coming to him through the half-open doorway of his bedroom.

Baxter had just been to his bath, and was now returning to his dressing-room. “Yes, grandad. Are you all right?”

“I wur never so happy since my owd lass died, my lad! Come in here, and speak to me.”

He entered the room, and found old Amos sitting up in bed. It needed no words to tell that he was happy. His eyes shone with a new-found joy, and he laughed like a boy.

“Baxter, I've summat to tell tha.”

“Yes, grandfather, what is it?”

“You know that I wanted yo' to wed Sir William Templeton's lass?”

Baxter was silent.

“Well, tha mustn't.”

“Why?” he asked. He wanted to be sure why the old man had changed.

“That lass is without God, and without hope of heaven,” cried old Amos, “and tha must noan wed her! I wur altogether in the wrong in telling thee to

kiss her. 'Ast 'a ever kissed her, lad?"

"Never," replied Baxter with a laugh.

"That's right! Well, tha mustn't. Tha must get hold of another lass."

"Who?" he asked.

"Nay, I don't know: but some lass that loves God."

Old Amos had been holding Baxter's hand for more than a minute, and then, before releasing it, he looked straight into his grandson's face. "Baxter, lad, 'ast 'a found it?" he cried.

Baxter was silent.

"'Ast 'a found it?" he repeated, as he continued looking at his grandson. "Why, tha 'ast! Tha 'ast the same light in thy eyes as Ned Stuttard and that young Stephen Wallace. God be praised, Baxter, lad!"

Baxter did not reply. Nevertheless, his heart was singing for joy. "It's wonderful; just wonderful!" he kept on saying to himself.

On arriving at his office, Nehemiah Blackburn came to greet him. "Is it true, Mr. Baxter?" he asked.

"Is what true?" countered the young man.

"About your grandfather."

"What about my grandfather?"

"It's the talk of the town," replied Nehemiah. "I am told that the congregation at St. George's Independent Chapel was nearly doubled last night. It was said all over the town that owd Amos was converted in the morning, and the people were that interested that they came by the score if in the evening in the hopes that, he would be there. Is it true that he was converted yesterday morning?" urged Blackburn.

"Go up and ask him," laughed Baxter. "Is he well enough?" countered the other. "You told me a few days ago," he added, "that the doctor was afraid he was breaking up. Anyhow, I hope what the people are saying is true. I wasn't in Baronstown yesterday. It was such a fine day that I went to Blackpool, and I didn't hear anything about it until I got home last night. But I hope it's true. Ay, Mr. Baxter, there's nothing in the world like religion, after all. If owd Amos has found God, I shall be glad, I shall for sure I It seems so strange that I can hardly believe it. Has he really?"

"He is very happy, anyhow," Baxter laughed, and there was such a look in the young man's eyes that Blackburn could not fail to read its meaning. "I tell you," he cried, and Blackburn, who was usually quiet and reserved,

almost shouted the words, “if owd Amos is converted, there’s going to be a revival in Baronstown! And there’s another piece of news, too, Mr. Baxter.”

“What’s that?” Baxter asked. “I was told this morning on my way here that Miss Ruth Townley is going to get well. I called in at Dixon Street to know how she was, and Mrs. Grimshaw told me that the doctor was so interested in her that he called early this morning.”

“Yes?” replied Baxter eagerly. “What of it?”

“She is going to get better,” was Blackburn’s reply. “The doctor said he was confident.”

“Thank God!” murmured the young man, as Blackburn left the room.

## 25. Baxter's Resolution

HOW MUCH BAXTER LONGED to go to Dixon Street that morning can be better imagined than described. But I he did not go; a strange reserve possessed him. On 1 the previous day, while his heart was torn with anxiety ' about Ruth Townley, he had, forgetful of gossiping tongues! and of the wisdom of his act, rushed to Dixon Street, I and made inquiries. For that matter, he had obeyed: a neighbor's behest, and gone boldly to the room where she was said to be dying. But now he felt afraid. He longed to see her; longed to speak with her, and Nehemiah Blackburn's news made the longing stronger. But he felt he must not go.

He tried to analyze his own feelings; tried to understand why such a change had come over him. "No," he said to himself, "no one must know that I love her, or what I have in my heart concerning her until she is well enough to hear and understand. Then I will go to her boldly."

No one had ever called him a snob, and yet, in his heart of hearts, he was glad that his society was sought after by such people as the Templetons. For that matter, it is doubtful whether he would have gone near Templeton Court but for the fact that the Templetons were said to be "the best people in the county."

But he was not troubled at all by the fact that his heart had gone out to a girl who lived in one of the meanest streets in Baronstown, and who had been obliged to starve herself in order that her mother might have the food she needed.

And yet he was glad that she had been proud in her poverty; glad that she had never mingled with the coarse people who lived contiguous to her. As for anything else, what did it matter? He loved her, and the doctor's assurance that she would get well brought him an untold Joy.

But there was something deeper; something greater than all that. He could not understand it. He did not want to, but it was the greatest fact of his being, the greatest truth in his life. He felt God, and he was sure that God had answered his prayers.

It was like nothing else that had ever come to him. Hitherto everything he had cared about and known seemed to be narrow and circumscribed. A kind of *ne plus ultra* —there is nothing beyond—seemed to sum up his experiences. But now the world had grown bigger; everything had grown bigger. More than that, everything was shining with the light of a new meaning. He knew that behind everything, God was, Infinite and Eternal Love.

And it made the world new and more beautiful. Everything seemed glorified in the thought that God, Who was behind sorrow, misery, death and hell; God, Who was Eternal Love, had listened to him, had heard his prayer, and was making Ruth Townley better.

Strange to say, he did not ask himself whether the girl he loved would ever care for him. He knew that in the past, whenever he had had occasion to speak to her, Ruth Townley had been cold and reserved. But he had never asked what this meant; never in any way troubled about it.

He had not been in his office long before Dr. Black rung him up. “Is that you, Baxter?” the doctor said.

“Tes.”

“I am glad to tell you that the news I gave you last night concerning the patient in whom you have been interested is confirmed this morning.”

“I am very glad,” exclaimed Baxter, but there was no tremor in his voice, and he gave no sign that he was particularly interested.

“Yes, she has turned the corner in a most remarkable way,” went on the doctor. “Yesterday morning I wouldn’t have given Sixpence for her chance of recovery, while now— It’s just wonderful! I thought you would be glad to know,” he added, as he hung up the receiver.

Baxter felt like shouting for joy. It was all so wonderful. It was more than wonderful. “I can’t stay in,” he reflected. “I simply can’t. I must get out. Why, I have found the greatest thing in the world! Nothing else I have ever known or thought of is worthy of being compared with this!”

He went to the factory garage, and brought out his car. “I’ll go and see Wallace,” he said to himself. “It’s only right that he should know what’s come to me. I could see by his face yesterday morning that he thought I was angry. Well—”

His heart sang for joy as he drove towards that part of the town where Wallace lived, and presently he reached St. George’s Manse.



“Hallo, Baxter! It is awfully good of you to look me up, but— There’s nothing the matter, I hope?”

“I wanted to confirm my grandfather’s arrangement with you concerning tonight,” Baxter replied. Then seeing the look in Wallace’s eyes, he ceased speaking. There was something he couldn’t understand. “What is it, old man?” he said.

“Would your grandfather mind if I didn’t come tonight?” Wallace asked, and then he blushed a fiery red.

“I am sure he would mind,” replied Baxter. “I should mind, too. What is it?”

“I hardly dare to tell you,” exclaimed Stephen Wallace, “especially after yesterday morning. I can’t help myself either, and what’s more, I don’t want to!”

“What, in Heaven’s name, do you mean?” exclaimed Baxter.

“I am a mean cuss, old man,” explained the young minister, “and although I am happier than ten thousand kings, I can’t help feeling at this moment that God Almighty is a little bit of a cynic.”

“Why—why—?” exclaimed Baxter. “This from you I What in Heaven’s name——?”

“I don’t mean it,” was Wallace’s response; “and yet although I am so confoundedly happy, I can’t help feeling as though I am happy at your expense.”

“My expense I—I don’t understand you!”

“You will in a minute. Look here, my friend, you don’t mind, do you? Say you don’t mind!”

“Say I don’t mind what?”

“Well, it’s this way. I was on the mountain-top yesterday; I was really; and when your grandfather said what he did in church, I felt like jumping over the pulpit. I did really. Then, during the afternoon— everybody is talking about it, you know, and saying that a miracle has happened—I wanted all my best friends to know that my ministry wasn’t a complete failure. Why,” and Wallace’s eyes shone with a wondrous light, “just think of it! Two men, the two most important in the town, men whose influence will be felt in every corner of the town, made confession that I had led them to God I Think of it!—Well, I really couldn’t help it, and I went up to the Scotch Manse, and had a chat with dear old Mr. McAlpine about it. Well,

Peggy Edgecumbe and her mother came into Mr. McAlpine's study while we were talking, and, of course, the wonderful news came out."

"What news?" asked Baxter eagerly. To him, old Amos Lancaster's conversion seemed as nothing to the knowledge he himself had discovered, and especially that Ruth Townley was out of danger.

"Why, that your grandfather was converted, of course," exclaimed Wallace, "and of the wonderful effect it had had upon him!"

"Yes," responded Baxter. "What then?"

"What then! Why, I watched Peggy's face, and I was more in love with her than ever! I couldn't help myself—Yes, I know you English people talk about the Scots as being icicles, and cold blooded, and all that sort of thing, but we are volcanoes compared with you! Yes, I don't forget all you told me about Peggy, but directly after the service last night I went up to the Scotch Manse again, and Peggy opened the door to me. Yes, I am calling her Peggy, old man! I have the right to, too; for no sooner did I see her than I forgot everything else!—Yes, I must tell you, I can't help it—— 'Peggy!' I cried, and a minute later she was in my arms, and we were kissing each other! Oh, I know I am a mean skunk to tell you like this! We are all selfish brutes where a girl is concerned, Baxter; but I do love her, and she loves me, too! What is more, the faith of her childhood has come back to her."

"Did she tell you so?" asked Baxter.

"I am not going to tell you any more now," laughed the young Scotsman. "I am almost ashamed of myself for saying what I have, but I couldn't help it. You see, we are engaged! Peggy has promised to marry me! And there is only one fly in the ointment, Baxter—— Even last night when my heart was singing aloud for joy, I couldn't help remembering you."

"I am so glad you are happy, Stephen," exclaimed Baxter, "and—and I hope you are not bothered about me!"

"But I can't help it!" exclaimed Wallace. "You see, we are friends, and—Oh, I wish I could make you understand!"

"I understand all I want to understand, old man," replied the other.

"All you want to understand! What do you mean?"

"Don't you know? Can't you guess?" laughed Baxter.

"Come here to the light, and let me look at you again," and the young minister shouted aloud. "Tell me," he demanded, "what are you saying?"

"I am saying this," replied Baxter; "that I, too, have learnt the truth which came to my grandfather yesterday morning."

“Good God Almighty!—Excuse the language, old man, but I can’t help myself—Why, I believe I am more glad than I was last night!—And you don’t feel a bit bitter towards me, Baxter?”

“Bitter, old man!” and there was a sob in Baxter Lancaster’s voice. “Bitter towards the man who has made me feel—what I feel! I believe I told you a lie, old fellow. I didn’t come here to confirm my grandfather’s arrangement about your coming to dinner; I came to tell you that I had discovered the greatest ’thing in the world. And I owe it all to you, too!”

“Great God, won’t Peggy be happy!” exclaimed Wallace, and the light of a wondrous joy shone in his eyes. “Oh, forgive me, old man, I know what you must be feeling about her; and I, God help me!—am—am so happy!”

“So am I!” exclaimed Baxter meaningly. “You see, Wallace, I have learnt to know that God Almighty never makes a mistake.”

Two minutes later these young men, both of whom had forgotten anything like reserve, became circumspect again. Had Baxter been told the day before that he would have talked, even to Stephen Wallace, about such a matter in such a way, he would have said it was impossible; while the young minister was in the habit of saying that he had no faith in people who spoke freely about their religious experiences. But, as Baxter Lancaster confessed to himself afterwards, God had a strange way of turning all our preconceived notions upside down.

“Then you are not coming to dinner tonight?” asked Baxter at length.

“I’d love to, old chap, in a way, but I must dine with Peggy. I really must! She will expect me. You see, I never thought about what I promised your grandfather when we said good night. You will make it right with him, won’t you?”

“I’ll try, old man.”

When Baxter Lancaster left the St. George’s Manse that morning, he was thankful that he had not said a word to Stephen Wallace about his hopes concerning Ruth Townley. He felt that even to his dearest friend there were certain things about which one couldn’t help being reserved. For that matter, even while that very evening he had a long chat with his grandfather concerning his new-found joy and knowledge, he never said a word about Ruth Townley. This was not because he did not long to do so, but because of a strange sensitiveness which grew stronger as the days went by.

Of what old Amos said to him concerning the faith which had come to him, it is not for me to write freely. For that matter, although the old man

continued to speak jubilantly about the hopes and joys which had come into his own heart, he said but little to his grandson when the young man told him that God had also spoken to him. It was true that old Amos's lips quivered, while tears came into his eyes and rolled down his wrinkled cheeks; but he said very little more than: "Bless the Lord, my lad! I felt sure that when it came to me it would come to you, too!"

And yet had old Amos known all the truth, he would have been very troubled about the lad who was becoming more and more dear to him each day. As we have before hinted, Baxter had become more and more sensitive concerning any suggestion of intimacy with Ruth Townley. So much so that, while he received news each day from Dr. Black concerning Ruth's progress, he did not go near Dixon Street.

This, as may be imagined, was not because of want of desire, but because he was anxious to give no occasion for any suggestion of gossip. On being told that she was ill, perhaps dying, he had rushed to her side; but now the daily reports came to him that she was improving in health, he felt he could give no satisfactory reason for going. And yet he longed to go; longed to repeat the words which he had uttered that Sunday afternoon when she was far away in the realms of unconsciousness.

He had told Dr. Black that the services of the nurses were to be continued as long as there was the slightest necessity for them. Also he had, on the following Saturday, sent a messenger with a note containing her salary, and with the expression of his hope that she would be soon well enough to return to the office again. She was admonished, however, that she must not return to work until she felt absolutely certain that she was well enough to do so.

Then followed an incident which, for the moment, seemed to break up the foundations of Baxter Lancaster's life.

About ten days after his visit to Dixon Street, he rung up Dr. Black's surgery. He had received no news concerning Ruth for the previous two days, and was wondering at the doctor's silence. Moreover, he had been much engaged in a business which had taken him out of Baronstown, and, as a consequence, news concerning her had not reached him. "Your patient is all right, I trust, Black?" Baxter said.

"Haven't you heard about her?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Heard what I?"

“That she has left Baronstown,” was the reply. “When I called last Monday she told me it was her intention to go. My reply was that she was not yet well enough to go. But on my arrival the next day, she had gone.”

“Gone!” repeated Baxter. “But why wasn’t I informed?”

“Of course,” replied the doctor, “neither you nor I had any control over her, and although I did not think her action wise, she was so far recovered that I could not stop her.”

“But—but I did think—” He did not finish his sentence.

“Yes, yes, I know,” said Dr. Black, who anticipated the conclusion of what he wanted to say, “and I told the nurse to tell you all about it. Hasn’t she done so?”

“She has never been near me,” was the reply.

“And you have not been to Dixon Street?” asked the doctor.

“No!”

“Then the explanation will be that the nurses were called away hurriedly to other cases. I am awfully sorry, Baxter, but still you needn’t be worried. Miss Townley, while very weak, did not, according to my judgment, run any risk of a relapse by going away.”

Baxter, unable to control himself, drove rapidly to Dixon Street, where he found that Ruth Townley’s cottage was already occupied by new tenants.

“Ay, we came in yesterday,” a woman informed him. “The lass who lived here left several days ago. I don’t know anything about where she went, but I am told she has left the town.”

Baxter hurried from the cottage to the hospital, where he found the night nurse. This lady, on being asked concerning Miss Townley’s whereabouts, professed entire ignorance. “She told me she was going,” the nurse admitted, “but she wouldn’t say where.”

“Had she any money?” Baxter asked anxiously.

The nurse only shook her head at this.

“But why didn’t you tell me that she was leaving Baronstown?”

At this the woman seemed confused. “She begged me not to let you know,” she admitted at length. “I fancy,” she explained, “she didn’t like to feel that she owed the hospital money.”

“But I made that right with the hospital authorities!” urged Baxter.

“Yes, I know, and I fancy she found it out, too. Anyhow, she was anxious that you should know nothing about her going, and she hinted that, as soon as she was able to pay you back, she would do so.”

“But I don’t understand,” Baxter persisted. “You told me just now she had no money! How did she leave Baronstown? And where has she gone?”

“I told you I didn’t know where she had gone,” replied the nurse. “As for money,” and here the woman looked confused, “I myself sold for her two or three of her things that were valuable. These brought enough to enable her to get away. She doesn’t owe a penny,” she added, “except to Dr. Black and yourself, and she said she means to pay you both the first moment she was able.”

Beyond this Baxter could discover nothing, and although he made many inquiries, Ruth Townley’s whereabouts were a mystery to him.

And yet he did not lose heart. In a way he could not understand, he felt sure that they would meet again. Besides, a consciousness that God was all around him and in him grew stronger each day, and became the great joy of his life. Not that he forgot Ruth Townley, or ceased to long for her. Rather, this longing strengthened instead of weakened. Nevertheless, he had the conviction that all was well.

But no one knew that he loved her; not even Stephen Wallace or his grandfather. To him it was too sacred a thing to talk of; and while hope never died, that hope was nevertheless unrealized.

Meanwhile the weeks passed away. The day of the great fete which Sir William Templeton had, through Evelyn, decided to give, came and passed away; but, much to Evelyn’s chagrin, Baxter made no declaration.

“Why does he not speak?” asked the girl of herself again and again. “The first of September will soon be here, and I shall have to confess to Judy Whitby that she has gained her bet; and I hate the thought of doing that! Besides, that old Gypsy woman promised me that he should propose, and I have given him every opportunity of doing so. But I won’t give in? I am sure he likes me; sure, too, that the old woman is not an impostor. But how can I get him to declare himself?”

That very day (the end of August was now drawing near), Evelyn made her way through the park towards the lodge gates, where months before she had seen the old Gypsy woman.

She had not gone far along the road when she again heard the words: “May I tell your fortune, my pretty lady?”

Yes, it was the same woman, and she spoke in the same honied tones.

“Didn’t you speak to me months ago?” asked the girl. “Didn’t you come to the fete at my father’s house, and pretend to tell the fortunes of a lot of

the guests?"

The old woman looked confused. "Ask him again," she whispered.

"Ask him again!" repeated Evelyn. "I have never asked him!"

"Ask him to dinner," said the old woman in meaning tones, "and invite a possible rival to meet him, and your wishes shall be gratified."

On the morning of the twenty-sixth of August, Baxter received a letter from Sir William Templeton, urging him to come to dinner that night. It was written in the friendliest terms, and told him that he, Sir William, wanted to ask his advice concerning a financial project which he had in view.

That same morning, moreover, Evelyn Templeton's voice reached him in his office. "You are coming to dinner tonight, aren't you?" she asked.

"I have just had a letter from your father," Baxter replied. "He tells me he wants to see me."

"Yes, and perhaps someone else wants to see you, too; besides, you haven't been here for weeks," said the girl petulantly. "You won't disappoint me, will you— Baxter?"

He held the telephone to his ear like one in doubt. Then a look of sudden resolution came into his eyes. "Yes, I'll tell her," he said to himself.

## 26. Evelyn Templeton's Wager

IT WAS A WARM, sultry evening when, on the twenty-sixth of August, in the year 192—, Baxter Lancaster arrived at Templeton Court. Dark clouds had been lowering all the day, and the heat was oppressive.

“There is thunder in the air,” exclaimed old Amos Lancaster to his grandson, when Baxter arrived home earlier than was his wont from his office. “Art’a going out again tonight, lad?”

“Yes, I am dining at Templeton Court.”

Old Amos looked at him keenly. “Art’a going to kiss that lass tonight, after all?” he asked.

“What would you say if I did?” asked Baxter.

Old Amos did not speak, but he looked long and g l steadfastly at his grandson’s face. After Baxter had gone, old Amos went around the house singing.

It was seven o’clock when Baxter arrived at Templeton Court, and was shown into a room where Sir William sat.

“I hope you will forgive the liberty I am taking with you, Baxter,” remarked Sir William in a somewhat patronizing way, “but I look on you more in the light of a relative than as a stranger. So does Evelyn,” he added. “As you may remember, too, I spoke to you about business some time ago, and it turned out to my advantage; and now I want your advice again.”

“If it will do you any good, I shall be delighted to give it,” replied Baxter, looking at his host a little uneasily.

They discussed the matter in hand for several minutes. And then Baxter became bewildered, for Sir William Templeton made some statements which, as far as he, Baxter, could see, could only mean that he expected the young man to become more closely associated with the Templeton family. It is true he uttered no word which could be definitely fastened on as meaning this. Nevertheless, there was that in the attitude which he adopted, as well as in the way he spoke, that made Baxter feel as though he had in some way pledged himself.



“Have I,” the young man repeatedly asked himself, “in any way led her to think—? By Jove! I wouldn’t do a dishonorable thing for worlds, and —!”

He was on the point of speaking to Sir William again when a knock came to the door, and Baxter never more rejoiced at an interruption in his life than he rejoiced then.

“Lord Reginald Ludmore,” announced the butler, and a young man came into the room.

Baxter wondered what the look on Sir William Templeton’s face portended. Was he annoyed, or was he pleased? It would be difficult to tell, and although the baronet treated them both with great cordiality, Baxter’s quick mind felt as though something sinister were in the background.

“Be thankful, Reggie,” said Sir William presently, “that you have no need to worry about business, and that you need not make calculations in regard to finance.”

“By gad!” retorted Lord Reggie Ludmore, whose father was said to have a rent-roll of fifty thousand a year. “If the old man has a comfortable income, he has jolly big outgoings as well! He often tells me that if I had the brains of a rabbit, and went into business, I should make money. But there, I haven’t! and the pater tells me,” he added, “that, unless I am careful, I shall die in the bankruptcy court.”

Lord Reggie was a handsome young fellow, and while not overburdened with brains, talked pleasantly, and was evidently a great favorite with Sir William. “How is the Marquis?” he asked presently. The Marquis was Sir William Templeton’s nearest relative.

“He is very ill,” replied Sir William. “All the doctors say it is only a matter of days now.”

“And you are heir to the title, aren’t you?”

“We will not discuss that now,” replied the other. All the same, the impression conveyed to Baxter was that Sir William Templeton would soon be the Marquis of —; and his importance was enhanced accordingly.

Throughout the evening Evelyn Templeton seemed to be playing one of the young men off against the other. She did it skilfully, too, and a careful onlooker would have said that she had a purpose in every word she spoke that night.

Nevertheless, when Baxter left the house at eleven o’clock, he had not, to use old Amos’s expression, kissed her. And yet, as the young man could

not help reflecting, she had given him every opportunity of doing so. More than once they had been left alone together under circumstances in which it would have been easy for fateful words to have been spoken. But Baxter did not speak them.

He left the great house at eleven o'clock, while Lord Reggie watched his departure with a curious look in his eyes. Three days later, on opening the correspondence which came to Barons Court, Baxter gave an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it, lad?" asked old Amos, who sat at the breakfast table.

"It's an invitation to the wedding of Miss Judy Whitby, near the town of that name," replied Baxter. "I don't know the family; do you?"

"Ay, a bit," replied the old man. "Old John Whitby is a warm man, and I should like you to keep on good terms with him."

"Would you suggest, then, that I should accept?" asked Baxter. "There seems not the slightest reason for asking me," he added.

"Ay, I think I'd accept."

"But it wants only two days to the wedding, and there is scarcely time to buy a Wedding present!" exclaimed Baxter.

On the afternoon of the same day Baxter felt himself still more mystified, especially when a clerk told him that Lord Reginald Ludmore wanted to speak to him on the telephone.

"Yes, what is it?" asked the young man, on placing the telephone to his ear.

"This is Ludmore. Is that Mr. Baxter Lancaster?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?" asked Baxter.

"Will you be home tonight?"

"I can be."

"Would you mind if I dropped in at your house after dinner?" asked Lord Reggie. "Say about nine o'clock," he added.

"Why not come to dinner?" asked the young man.

"No, thank you, I'll get a bite at 'The Thistle' in Baronstown," was the reply. "At nine o'clock I'll look you up, then?"

Baxter puzzled himself a good deal as to the meaning of this, and, according to Lord Reggie's request, was alone in the snugery at the time the young man had mentioned.

"Dash it!" exclaimed the young fellow, as presently he was shown into the room where Baxter sat. "I am in no end of a hole, and I hope you will

forgive me for appearing like this.”

“I am very glad to see you,” rejoined Baxter. “What can I do for you?”

“Look here”—and evidently Lord Reggie was greatly perturbed. “Of course you will remember that we met at Templeton Court the other night?”

“Naturally,” replied Baxter.

“I say, what were you doing there?” asked Lord Reggie excitedly.

“Pardon me,” replied Baxter. “I don’t quite understand you.”

“No, of course you don’t! And if I weren’t so dashed excited, I shouldn’t talk like this! But I am nuts on Evelyn! Just nuts!”

I beg your pardon?” replied Baxter, looking at the other curiously.

“Yes, I am,” replied Lord Reggie. “And look here, if I had a bean to my name, I’d propose straight off. For that matter, I’ve proposed already, and yet— Oh, I don’t know how to put it! But my dad is good for another twenty years at least, and I hope he is good for forty! But I am nuts on Evelyn! I have been for years, and I have asked her again and again to have me, but she won’t. You see, I am a younger son, and while the old man will, I dare say, stump up very well on the wedding day, and all that, I don’t stand much of a chance, and that’s straight! All the same, I am, as I told you, in love with Evelyn, and—— Well, for the first time in my life I felt, when we were there together the other night, that I had a chance. On the other hand, I have been told that you have been up to Templeton Court a goodish bit, and everyone knows you are rolling in dibs. For that matter, some say you have already proposed to Evelyn, but I know you haven’t, as yet. All the same, you are a dashed good chap, and I don’t want to butt in if you have a prior claim to her. Do you see?”

“You mean,” said Lancaster, “that you are in love with Miss Evelyn Templeton, and that you have been told that I have a prior claim to her?”

“In a way,” burst in Lord Reggie. “Of course, you are another Rothschild as far as the oof is concerned, and in that way I don’t count where you come in. All the same, I have hardly known if I have been on my head or my heels since we met there, and when I spoke to Sir William Templeton about it before I telephoned to you today, he kind of made me feel that I might have a chance. But dash it all! are you in the running, or aren’t you?”

If you are, I’ll dry up!”

Baxter did not quite understand Lord Reggie’s description of his position. The young fellow was terribly excited, and seemed unable to speak coherently.

“The top and the bottom of it is,” continued Lord Reggie, “what do you suggest that I should do? There I I am not such a bad chap, and I am head over heels in love! Besides, I thought Evelyn seemed undecided today, and if I could tell her— Well, you know what I mean I I could go up tonight, although it is a bit late, and tell her you are not in the running. What should you say if I did?”

“I should say ’ Good luck to you!” replied Baxter, who felt as though a load were lifted from his heart as he uttered the words.

“And you wouldn’t think I had butted in, and that I was mean, and all that sort of thing?” exclaimed Lord Reggie.

“Not a bit of it! And by the way, let me ring for some refreshments.”

When Lord Reginald left Barons Court half an hour later, Baxter felt as though a great burden had been lifted from his heart. More than once, since coming back from Templeton Court, he had been haunted by the thought that he had in some way led Evelyn Templeton to believe that he was pledged to offer her his hand. Thus Lord Reggie’s confession came to him as a great relief, and he laughed aloud after the young man had left the house.

Baxter Lancaster did not go to Judy Whitby’s wedding. He felt sure he would be out of place there; felt sure that the invitation had been sent to him as an afterthought, and, on thinking carefully about it, he believed that he understood its meaning. Especially was this so when, the day after the wedding, he read in the local newspaper not only an account of Judy Whitby’s marriage, but also an announcement of the engagement between Lord Reginald Ludmore and Miss Evelyn Templeton.

“More than ordinary interest is attached to the announcement of this engagement,” the local newspaper paragraph went on to say. “The Marquis of —— passed away last night, and as Sir William Templeton, Miss Evelyn Templeton’s father, was the next of kin to the late Marquis, he now enjoys that title. We hope we shall not be regarded as presumptuous in saying that Miss Templeton was much sought after, but that evidently she preferred to remain true to her own class to becoming associated with a rich parvenu, who had for some time been seeking her hand.”

Baxter Lancaster laughed aloud as he read this announcement, especially that part of it which he was sure referred to himself. But there was no bitterness in his laugh; rather there was gladness.

Later still he heard the history of his invitation to the wedding, and what was expected to be announced that day.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed, “I’ve had a lucky escape!”

Although that might be so, however, Baxter Lancaster’s heart was not satisfied, and he knew it never would be until he found Ruth Townley. Where she had gone he did not know. No one seemed to know, for that matter, and although he used all the means which he felt justified in using in order to find her, he had no knowledge as to where she was. "

Not that he was unhappy. Rather, he felt that he would never be unhappy again, for life as a whole was fuller, richer, gladder than he had ever known it before.

Barons Court was a more cheerful house, too. Old Amos Lancaster seemed to become years younger. Not only had he taken up the habit of chapel-going again, but he went around the old house at Barons Court singing like a boy; while as the days grew shorter, he shouted in his joy as he roamed around the park.

“Baxter lad,” he said to his grandson one morning at breakfast, “I’ve asked Stephen Wallace to come here for a bit of dinner tonight. You told me you’d be in, you know.”

“Yes, I remember,” replied the young man.

“Ay, and I’ve asked the Wesley minister to come in, too.”

Baxter looked at him questioningly.

“Ay,” retorted old Amos, interpreting Baxter’s look, “I know that young Wallace is the best man in the town, but, for all that, I belong to Th’owd Body. My owd lass did when she wur alive, and I do, too. I was born a member of Th’owd Body, and I shall die a member of Th’owd Body. But that isn’t all. Dost’a know what I’ve got in my mind, lad?”

“I know what I’ve had in my mind for days,” replied Baxter.

“What?” asked old Amos. “I wonder if you have been thinking the same thing as I have? For I’ll tell tha’ this, lad, we have no right to keep all our money to ourselves. When months ago I talked with you about the fete that we had here, my great thought was that you would be talked about as the richest lad in Lancashire. But I don’t think about things in that way now!”

“No?” queried Baxter.

“Lad,” and old Amos’s voice was tremulous, “I feel as though you and I have escaped something worse than the hell that used to be preached about

when I wur a lad.”

“In what way?” asked Baxter, and there was a strange light in his eyes as he spoke.

“As I think of it now,” and old Amos became very earnest, “I can see that I wur on the point of everlasting blackness and death. I had, for fifty years, been killing God; that is, all the God that was within me. But I have been saved, Baxter lad!”

“I know,” replied Baxter quietly.

“Ned Stuttard was nearly as bad,” went on the old man. “When his wife died he was in hell, a worse hell than any pit of fire and brimstone which was preached about by those early Methody preachers! You saw him I you heard him!”

“Yes, I saw him; I heard him,” replied Baxter, as he recalled the night when he, together with Stephen Wallace, visited old Ned Stuttard’s house.

“Weel, lad?” and old Amos looked at his grandson questioningly.

“Yes, I think I understand,” replied the young man. “You and I have both got the biggest thing in the world. I know it is not in the fashion to talk about religion in these days. In fact, the young men and women in our time think they can do without it. I did; but it won’t do, grandad! We have found the greatest and grandest thing in the world, and we mustn’t keep it to ourselves. You haven’t stopped at inviting Stephen Wallace and the Wesley minister tonight, have you?”

“What dost’a mean, lad?”

“I mean that we ought to have every parson in the town here, whether Conformist or Nonconformist, Protestant or Catholic. We ought to get together every Sunday school teacher, every local preacher, every Christian worker, and make them realize what we realize. It’s the greatest thing in the world, grandad! I’ve been thinking about it for days, and the more I’ve thought the more it’s burned like fire into my heart and brain.”

Old Amos leapt to his feet. “Thou art right, lad! Thou art right! But are the parsons ripe for it?”

“We must try to make them ripe for it!” exclaimed Baxter. “There’s nothing so great in the world; nothing that the world needs so much as the knowledge which Christ came to give! Just think!” and the Baxter who had been a few weeks before cold and skeptical about such matters, began pacing the room. “Stephen Wallace never said a truer thing than when he said on that Sunday morning after Eliza Stuttard died that we were

becoming atrophied! Yes, it's a ghastly word, grandad; but it's true as far as our age is concerned! The world is becoming more and more dead to the greatest truth in the world, and, as a consequence, it is going faster and faster to the devil I Just think of it! After all, what is the real panacea for the world's ills? What's the cure for bad trade; for war; for the continual struggle between master and man; for that which is often dragging our humanity down to the level of brute beasts?"

"Ay! Ay! Ay! thou are right, lad!" exclaimed old Amos.

"I know I am right," replied Baxter, "and the worst of it is that the clergy, the ministers, the church does not realize it! That's why I am thankful we are rich, grandad, for this money of ours must be used in making known this great thing which has come to us. I am glad you are inviting Stephen Wallace and the Wesley minister to dinner tonight. But that must be only the beginning! God helping us, we will change the life of this town."

Tears welled up in the eyes of old Amos as he heard this, and rushing towards his grandson, caught his hand and held it for a long time. "Ay, lad," he almost sobbed, "what would I have given if my owd lass wur here, and heard you talk like this!"

"Perhaps she is here," replied Baxter.

A look like wonder came into old Amos's eyes. "Ay, 'appen she is," he cried, "'appen she is! Baxter lad, you know that at one time I wanted you—" He stopped for a moment, and then seemed to be in doubt about continuing. "Ay, lad," he said presently, "but what wouldn't I give to see you wedded to a lass who was sure of God, like my owd lass wur fifty year agone! I am glad you didn't kiss that Templeton lass," he added presently.

"I am glad I didn't, too."

"'Ast 'a got anybody in tha' mind, lad?"

Baxter did not reply.

"Look here, wilt 'a promise me something, Baxter?" exclaimed old Amos.

"I will if I can."

"I made a fool of mysen when I tried to persuade you to take on with that Templeton lass," he admitted. "All the same, I'd like you to promise me something."

"I will if I can, grandfather."

“I may be an old fool,” exclaimed the old man. “For that matter, I know I am about lots of things; but I am sure I would know the lass that would make you happy. Look here, lad, wilt ‘a promise me that when tha’ ‘ast got a lass tha’ wilt bring her to me? I want to see if she will do.”

“I would to God I could bring her to you, grandad!” exclaimed Baxter.

The old man looked at his grandson inquiringly, and by the look that flashed from his eyes he might have divined what was in his grandson’s mind. “Tell me about it, lad! Tell thy old grandfeyther.”

And Baxter told him what was in his heart.

“Tha’ wilt find her!” shouted old Amos, “and when tha’ dost, tha’ must bring her to thy old grandfeyther?”

“There is no fear about that, grandad; I will bring her to you if I find her!”

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Weeks passed away, and Baxter heard no news of Ruth Townley. Months went, and while a new spirit had come into many of the churches at Baronstown, and while some of the ministers were aroused to the reality of their work as they had never been aroused before, Baxter, although he had done his utmost to find her, neither saw nor heard any sign of Ruth Townley.

Then something happened.

One day, it was a fortnight before Christmas, Baxter closed the desk in his office with a sigh of relief. He was looking pale and somewhat fagged. For more than six months now he had had all the weight of responsibility of the great house of Lancasters upon his shoulders, for although old Amos had, as he declared, grown young again, he refused to have anything to do with business.

“Yes,” cried Baxter to himself, after he had given his instructions to the various heads of departments, “I’ll go South for the Christmas. I’ll go to Cannes and San Remo, and possibly from there I’ll go on to Naples, and, may be, as far as Egypt. At any rate, I’ll have a thorough rest.”

He said nothing of this to his grandfather, but it was his fixed intention to leave England for a time, and to bask in the warmth of a Southern climate.



Before going back to Barons Court, however, he made his way towards St. George's Manse, where he hoped to find Wallace.

"You look a bit fagged and pale, old man!" the young minister greeted him.

"Yes, I have been working rather hard. It is possible I may go away for Christmas. If grandfather is all right. I shall certainly do so. But I thought I would come to see you first. I know you are interested in a lot of charities, and I thought I would like a talk with you about them before leaving the country."

"That's just like you to think of me!" replied Wallace, "and, of course, I shall make you dip your hand pretty heavily into the exchequer. As for your going away, I can't allow it!"

"Can't allow it! What do you mean?"

"Well, it's all been arranged in a hurry that I am going to get married on Christmas Day, and of course I must have my best friend for my best man at the wedding. No, it's no use you: objecting. That's settled. You don't mind, do you?" for the young minister noted a look on Baxter's face which disturbed him.

"Mind! My dear chap, I shall be as glad as a bird to see you wedded! And you needn't trouble about me either! I can think of your Peggy without a pang."

"Do you really mean that, old man? As you know, I have never spoken to you about it since last summer, and although, as you know, I have rejoiced with you in your newly found faith, I haven't been able to help wondering."

"It's all right, Stephen, my friend," exclaimed Baxter. "Not only is your Peggy nothing to me, but I doubt if I ever cared for her in that way. As I have told you before, I honestly believe it was my grandfather's desire that I should marry Miss Templeton that turned my thoughts towards your Peggy. No, my friend, I haven't a single thought in that direction now, except to rejoice with you that she is going to be the Wife of the minister of St. George's Independent Chapel. Yes, and I'll wait for you, so as to be present at the wedding on Christmas day."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Wallace. "That's settled, then."

"Of course," went on Baxter, "Mr. McAlpine will tie the knot?"

"It's quite natural that you should think so," replied Wallace. "I thought so until yesterday; but dear old Mr. McAlpine's chief friend was Peggy's

father's minister, and we have all decided that he shall be the man. He has already accepted, too," he added, "and is looking forward to coming with great glee. You see, he has heard all about you, and your grandfather, and me, and the work which is going on in the town here, and he wants to come and see what has actually taken place."

Baxter did not know why, neither could he explain the feeling that came into his heart, but he was sure that the man who was coming to marry Stephen Wallace to Peggy Edgecumbe would create an epoch in his own life.

## 27. In The Which Th' Owd Amos Lancaster Is Satisfied

THE SCOTCH CHURCH was crowded on Christmas Day. What wonder? It had been made known in the town that the old Scotch minister's niece was to be married to Stephen Wallace of the St. George's Independent Chapel, and the people of the town crowded the building. For Stephen was no longer looked upon as an unsuccessful minister, neither was St. George's Chapel any longer regarded as the Spiritual home of worldlings. For that matter, the conversion of Ned Stuttard and old Amos Lancaster created such a talk in the town that people throughout the whole district thronged to hear the young minister, and when they realized that he was a man with a message, they came again and again. For as people who had practically given up church-going said to each other after listening to him: "It's not because people care nothing about God that they have given up churchgoing, but because the parsons seem to have no grip on the truths they are supposed to preach. Let the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and all that Jesus Christ means, burn into the hearts of the preachers like a holy fire, and they will not want congregations."

Be that as it may, Baronstown had, during the past few months, learnt to appreciate and love Stephen Wallace, and, as a consequence, the Scotch church was crowded on Christmas morning to see the marriage.

"Ay, see," whispered one to another, "Baxter Lancaster is th' best man. That's as it ought to be."

"Ay," was the reply, "there's a wonderful change in Baxter."

And there was a wonderful light in his eyes as he handed the ring to Stephen Wallace, and although his heart was not fully satisfied, the kiss he gave the young bride was as unsullied as the kiss of a mother for her baby.

"Peggy," he whispered to her, as presently they reached the vestry, "you have accepted the right man., Have you any longer doubts as to whether you are fit to be a minister's wife?"

“I am the happiest girl in the world, Baxter!” was her reply.

The old Scotch divine, the Reverend Doctor Drummond, who was the officiating minister, had many years before accepted a call to one of the Presbyterian churches in Liverpool, and had remained in that city ever since. Dr. Drummond, moreover, was not only a great scholar, but a great social worker. Indeed, his church in Liverpool was a center of philanthropic enterprises.

“You don’t realize what we have to contend with in a city like Liverpool,” he remarked to Baxter Lancaster after the marriage ceremony was over, and they had returned to the Scotch Manse for the wedding luncheon. “I do not suppose,” he continued, “that there is another city in the British Isles where there is such a great percentage of poverty as there is in Liverpool.”

“And yet Liverpool is one of the richest cities in the country?” remarked Baxter. “I should imagine that there is more wealth per head of the inhabitants than in any place in Lancashire.”

“What do you argue from that?” asked the old Scotch minister quickly.

“That poverty should not exist in your midst,” replied Baxter.

At this Dr. Drummond laughed skeptically. “Pardon me,” he said, “Baronstown is not poor either, while the fame of the wealth of Lancasters has reached even to Liverpool. Is there no poverty in Baronstown?”

“There is no unrelieved poverty,” replied Baxter with a new tone in his voice. “At least, I hope not.”

“That’s interesting! Do you mean to say then—”

“I mean to say,” interrupted Baxter, “that the well-to-do people of the town have met together in order to grapple with poverty. Forgive me,” he added, “but lately the religion of Jesus Christ has become more and more a reality in our midst. Owing to the influence, especially of Stephen Wallace, who today has been married to Peggy Edgecumbe, there has been a wondrous revival of real religion, and the result of that revival has been that the people of, Baronstown have been led to regard poverty as a personal matter. For my own part,” went on the young man, “I can’t see how any man who really believes in Christ, can, if he has any means of mitigating it, allow poverty to continue. Care for one’s neighbor, especially for the poorer circumstanced, is surely a concomitant of the religion of Jesus Christ.”

“Then you believe,” cried Dr. Drummond, “that if Christianity were universally realized there would be no poverty?”

“I believe,” replied Baxter, “that in a really Christian community—that is if the inwardness of Christianity were recognized and acted on—the problem of poverty, and all that’s connected with it, would be so grappled as to make it impossible. Pardon me for saying this, but until lately I have scarcely thought about these things, and it is only because—”

“Don’t apologize, my dear fellow, I am only too glad to hear what you have to say. I have heard of the wonderful movement there has been here in Baronstown, and I am more than glad to meet you, and to hear what you have to say. But tell me—”

Whereupon Baxter was led to answer many questions, and to speak more and more freely of the influences which had lately been at work in Baronstown.

“I wish that what is true of you was also true of us in Liverpool,” cried Dr. Drummond at length. “As far as one can see, while there is a great deal of philanthropic work done there, we are, from a religious standpoint, slowly dying. Only two nights ago I had a conversation with, perhaps, the best worker in my church, and her conclusion was that living, vital Christianity was becoming less and less operative. She is wrong, of course, and she herself is the best proof that she is wrong. But perhaps there is some truth in it.”

Baxter looked at Dr. Drummond as if for explanation.

“I mean this,” replied the old minister. “This young lady, for she is a young lady, although poorly circumstanced, has given up her evenings not only to work among the slums, but to go to the houses of rich people, and beg them to help the poor. Why, do you know,” and there was the light of great affection which shone from the old man’s eyes, “we, that is the elders of my church and myself, are giving a kind of banquet to two thousand old people over sixty. and young people under twelve, who live in these same slums, through what that dear girl has collected. I will admit that the churches, as churches, may be in a bad way, but to say that Christianity is dead, or even dying, when you have such an example as that, is foolishness! Don’t you think so?”

“No one doubts the existence of individual Christians,” replied Baxter, “but evidently, from the way you speak of her, she is an exception.”

“Yes, in a way she is,” replied Dr. Drummond, “and yet not altogether so. She is a stranger to us,” he went on. “She only came to us last summer,

and I have never inquired of her as to the part of the country from which she came; but it was just after the summer vacation.”

“What’s her name?” asked Baxter eagerly.

The old minister laughed. “I have really forgotten,” he replied. “For that matter, I don’t think she has ever told me. We all call her Sister Ruth. I remember that when she came to the church she looked awfully pale and ill, and I remember asking her if such was the case. Her reply was that she had just recovered from an illness, and on coming to Liverpool she was anxious to do some Christian work. Of course, we gladly welcomed her,” he added, “and I rejoice that we did. Her example has meant a great deal to many others. I am glad to tell you this,” went on the old minister, “for while Liverpool can’t report anything like the great movement you can report here in Baronstown, yet, as you will see, we are trying to meet our responsibilities. I should be glad if you will come and visit our banquets tomorrow night,” he added.

Baxter’s eyes flashed, but for a few seconds he did not speak. Then he said slowly: “I told Stephen Wallace that I wanted to get out of England for a few weeks. I have been working very hard. But—I thought you said banquet, not banquets?” he added.

“It’s all owing to Sister Ruth,” laughed the old minister. “Her first idea was to give a banquet to children, but money came in so rapidly that she was led to think of old people, too. The truth is,” admitted Dr. Drummond, “I am inclined to think that although I have forgotten ’ her name—if I ever knew it—Sister Ruth belongs to an old Lancashire family. Indeed, one of the donors confessed to me that it was through learning her name that she gave so liberally. Anyhow, we had to secure two halls, one for the children, and one for the old people.”

After this Baxter Lancaster asked Dr. Drummond many more questions. But he did not start for his trip abroad as he had informed Stephen Wallace he had meant to do. Instead, on the morning of the following day, he, without even telling his grandfather of his plans, took a motorcar from the garage, and drove to Liverpool. Here, after having made arrangements for the car, he made his way to a hall in a poor part of the city, and began to look around eagerly.

There was a wonderful light in his eyes; a light which told of infinite things. “I wonder now? I wonder?” he ejaculated aloud more than once, as presently he discovered the district in which the hall was situated.

A large number of children were gathered. Evidently they belonged to the poorest classes of that great city. The day was cold and foggy, but evidently the weather did not damp the spirits of the children. They were all laughing gaily, while in their eyes was a look which gladdened Baxter's heart.

No one recognized him, for which he was glad.

The children gathered rapidly, until presently every seat at the tables was occupied, and the workers who had evidently prepared the banquet, were ready to serve the first course.

Presently a young minister in very pronounced clerical attire appeared. "We will sing grace," he said in a strong Scotch accent, "and then, doubtless, you will want to start eating. I am glad to tell you," he continued, "that Dr. Drummond will soon be here. He is at present at the other hall with the old people, who are, I hope, enjoying their Christmas dinner. Sister Ruth also will soon be here. She, too, is at the other hall, but I am sure she will be thinking about you."

At this the children gave a great cheer. Evidently the sister was a great favorite.

"Ah, here she comes!" exclaimed the young man, and a great shout went up which almost deafened Baxter, who had been eagerly watching and listening.

His heart gave a great leap. The sister who was so eagerly welcomed was Ruth Townley.

"Sister! Sister!" shouted the children, "say something to us! Make a speech."

The girl, with a glad smile on her face, spoke welcome words to a thousand children who were among the poorest and hungriest in that great city of Liverpool.

Baxter saw her move from table to table and from child to child like the ministering angel she was; saw, too, how eagerly the children welcomed her, how warmly they greeted her. Everywhere she went it was the same, to whoever she spoke, a joyous welcome greeted her.

He did not ask himself why she was there, or what circumstances had brought her there. He did not want to know. Neither did he make himself known to her. There was no reason why he should; and yet he watched her with hungering eyes, even while he wondered concerning her.

She had not been in the hall more than a few minutes before a great fear possessed him; a fear which was altogether strange to him. Never since she had left Baronstown had he doubted that when he did find her, she would welcome him gladly. He had no reason for believing this, nevertheless, he did. But now a great fear possessed him. What right had he to think that she would welcome him? It was true that she had been in his service, but so had hundreds of others who only thought of him as a means whereby they obtained a livelihood. Perhaps Ruth Townley thought of him in the same way. Anyhow, as soon as she had recovered from her illness she had, regardless of what he might be, thinking, left the town and gone away in silence.

Presently the meal came to an end, after which there was a concert and an hour of general rejoicing for the children.

Baxter remained still hidden from Ruth's eyes. He watched like one fascinated, too, watched while his heart went out more and more to her. Surely never, he thought, had God made anything so beautiful before I. Surely never had the dreams of any man been so fully realized! He heard her voice laughing with the rest; saw her eyes sparkling with fun; saw her lips parted with expectation, and hope, and joy; and he wondered.

The festivities were over at length, and then he made his way towards her.

Evidently she had not expected him; had no idea that he was present, for when she first saw him there was not only surprise in her eyes, but a pallor like the pallor of death crept over her face.

"Miss Townley," he said, "I hope—"

He heard himself utter the word, and yet he hoped nothing. He could not; it seemed as if something forbade him to hope.

But only for a moment.

She did not speak, but he saw the light which came to her eyes, the deep flush that surmounted her cheek.

A number of people were in the room, and more than one watched them.

But he took no notice. Holding out his hand, he grasped hers. "Miss Townley—Ruth!" he said.

A new light leapt into her eyes at this; a light which seemed to illumine everything.

"I want to see you alone," he went on in a low voice. "I want to tell you what's in my heart. Will you let me?"



She looked around her like one seeking help. Then she said almost with a gasp, "Not here! No, not here!—In an hour's time at 7, Hope Street! Ask for me there."

Baxter, regardless of whether anyone heard them, or was watching them, turned away without a word. "Seven, Hope Street," he repeated. "Hope Street!"

He did not at all know why it was, and he did not care to ask, he only kept on repeating. "Hope Street! Hope Street!"

A little later he found a policeman who told him where it was. "It's a good mile from here, sir, and in a poor part; but you will find it easily."

Find it! It would be a strange place that he could not find if Ruth was at the end of his search! And he laughed aloud as presently he reached the door of number 7.

"Yes," the woman who opened the door said, "Miss Townley lives here." Then she told him what hour her lodger was expected home. Evidently, however, she was suspicious of him, for she did not ask him in. Moreover she watched him with doubtful eyes as he strode up and down the street in front of her house.

Presently Ruth came, and she seemed like one surprised at seeing him.

"Forgive my not waiting for you at the hall," he said, "but I thought you did not want me. I have driven from Baronstown today. Dr. Drummond, who married Stephen Wallace and Peggy Edgecumbe yesterday, told me about the banquets that were to be given here in Liverpool, and he described you so minutely that I couldn't help coming. I have been searching for you for months," he added. "Why did you leave Baronstown like that?"

She did not answer him, but stood at the door of the house with her latch-key in her hand, as though she doubted what to do.

"I want to come in with you," he persisted. "May I? I want to tell you something which means everything to me."

Still she appeared in doubt. Then opening the door, she led the way to a little sitting-room where she switched on the lights.

The two stood looking at each other.

"Why did you leave Baronstown like that?" he repeated.

She did not reply, but he could not help seeing the look of pain which crossed her face. "I suppose it was very foolish of me," she said presently, "but I am very proud."

“But what had that to do with it?” he asked.

“I felt I owed you money,” was her reply. “You had spent a lot for me while I was ill, and, naturally, as soon as I got better I wanted to pay it back. And I couldn’t; that was why I was afraid!”

“Afraid of What?”

She was silent, although evidently an answer to his question was hanging on her lips. She spoke presently, however. “I got work,” she said; “I am hard at work all the time. Soon I hope to pay you everything.”

“Miss Townley,” he went on—“Ruth, I came to see you when you were ill. Do you remember?”

Immediately her lips trembled, and her face flushed.

“Do you remember?” he repeated. “You were ill; very ill. The nurse said you were dying, but I did not believe it. I told you something, too. Do you know what it was?”

The flush on her face deepened, while her lips became more and more tremulous.

“I could not help myself, Ruth,” he went on. “Do you know why? It was because you had become all the world to me. I had learnt to love you. Ruth, don’t you understand? Can’t you give me a little hope?”

Still she looked at him like one afraid. There was a bright light in her eyes, but it was mingled with fear. “I dare not I I—I—no, I dare not!” she stammered.

But he had seen something in her eyes which had emboldened him. “But I love you, Ruth!” was his answer. “I love you like my own life, and there is nothing so dear to me on earth as the thought of having you for my wife I Surely you know, Ruth! Surely you understand!”

“Let me look at you again,” she cried almost fiercely. “Let me be sure that—that— There! stand under the light just like that!”

She looked at him for nearly a minute. Then a hoarse cry escaped her lips. “O God, help me!” she cried; “Help me to do what’s right!” Then looking beseechingly into his eyes, she almost gasped the words: “Don’t tempt me! Don’t tempt me!”

“I don’t understand you, Ruth,” he exclaimed. “Tempt you! I want to have you for my wife; that’s all, and—”

“Yes, but listen!” she cried fiercely. “Not long before my mother died you came to see her. It was very good of you, but my mother told me that your soul was dead, that you had no faith, and while she was sure you loved

me, she begged me to avoid you. It was then I learnt my own secret, and, and— Do you know what I mean?—Directly after her funeral I was taken ill, and I thought I was going to die. Then you came, and somehow a new life came to me. Oh, I don't know how to explain it! And when you told me you loved me, and when I felt your lips on my cheek, I—I—oh, I don't know why, but I got better!—But I was afraid, so as soon as I was strong enough, I came away. I was afraid of you; afraid you would kill my faith in God; afraid I should never see my mother again!—If I did what my heart tells me to do, I should be what you ask. But I dare not! There, please leave me!”

A curious look came into Baxter's eyes, and for the first time since he had entered the room he laughed aloud. “Ruth,” he said, “since I knew that I loved you I have been constantly thinking of you; constantly repeating your name over to myself, and—yes, Ruth, I can say it with all my heart, I can say what another Ruth who lived long ago said to her friend: ‘Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God’!”

“Do you mean it; really mean it?” and her words were almost a gasp.

“Every hope and wish in my life is bound up in that, Ruth,” he cried.

“Let me look at you again?” and she caught his hand as she spoke. “Let me be sure!” and their eyes met. Then Ruth Townley was content.

Hours later Baxter Lancaster stood on the steps of that little house in 7, Hope Street. “You will be ready first thing in the morning, won't you?” he asked of the girl who stood by his side.

“But what if I don't please him?” she asked with a laugh. “You told me that your grandfather had idealized the woman he wants you to marry. I'm afraid I can't come up to his standard.”

Baxter laughed gaily. He felt so proud of Ruth, and his heart was so light that not a shadow of a fear came to him. Besides, had he not explained everything to her, and had not her own explanations swept away every difficulty? “I shall be here at half-past nine,” he almost shouted, “and we will be in Barons Court a long time before lunch is ready. Good night, Ruth. Let me have one more before I go!”

The girl was laughing gaily as a few minutes later she watched him walking in the direction of the Adelphi Hotel where he was staying. Then, when he was out of sight, she returned to her little room, where she sat for hours dreaming of the man she had learnt to love.

The next morning Liverpool, even Liverpool, looked bright and clear, and when presently Baxter and Ruth left the sordid streets of the great Lancashire metropolis, and came out into a comparatively clear countryside, both laughed in their joy.

“Oh, Ruth, my queen,” exclaimed Baxter, “you mean it, don’t you? Look at me in the eyes, and tell me you do!” he laughed.

“If only I were sure I shall please your grandfather!” and this time it was Baxter who shouted aloud in his glee.

As the young man had said, they reached Baronstown before noon, and both looked with longing eyes at the old house which stood up on the hillside above the grimy streets and the mill chimneys.

“Does it look like home, Ruth?” asked Baxter, as he looked into the girl’s shining eyes.

“I’ll tell you if I get your grandfather’s approval,” was her reply.

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Old Amos Lancaster was much excited that morning, for before getting up, a telephone message had reached him from Liverpool from his grandson Baxter. “I shall be home to lunch, grandfather,” were the words which came to him over the telephone, “and I am bringing someone with me, someone special.”

“Who art’ a bringing with tha, lad?” old Amos had asked.

But to this there was no reply, except that he heard his grandson laugh.

“Liverpool! Liverpool! I wonder who it is? I don’t know anybody in Liverpool,” he reflected, as he drew his chair more closely to the fire.

He heard the sound of wheels, and looking out of the window he saw Baxter’s car stop before the main entrance.

But he did not move. “The lad will know where I am,” he reflected.

A minute later Baxter appeared before him with Ruth by his side. “This is the someone special that I said I was bringing to you, grandfather,” the young man said, as he led Ruth close to where the old man sat.

Old Amos rose from his armchair, and having taken his handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his eyes. Then he looked at Ruth long and steadily. “Is this her, Baxter lad?” he queried.

“Yes, grandfather, this is her.”

Again old Amos looked at her searchingly and critically, yet with longing in his eyes. "She'll do, Baxter," he said presently. "She'll do! She's the grandest lass in Lancashire!"

"Yes, she is that," replied Baxter.

Still old Amos kept looking at her, his eyes becoming dimmer and dimmer all the time. "And tha art going to be Baxter's wife?" he said to Ruth, and his words were almost a sob.

"If you think I am fit for him," Ruth said.

Then old Amos broke down. "He's the grandest lad in Lancashire," he sobbed. "But tha art worthy of him! Would'st'a kiss me, my beauty? Would'st'a kiss thy old grandfeyther?"

"There!" cried old Amos as Ruth kissed him. "That's lovely! The Lord bless thee and keep thee, my beautiful! Ay," he hesitated a few seconds, and then finished his sentence. "Ay, may the Lord bless thee both," he said.

**The End**

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## Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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