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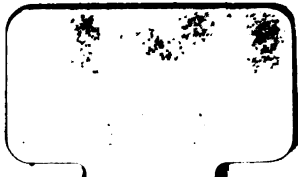
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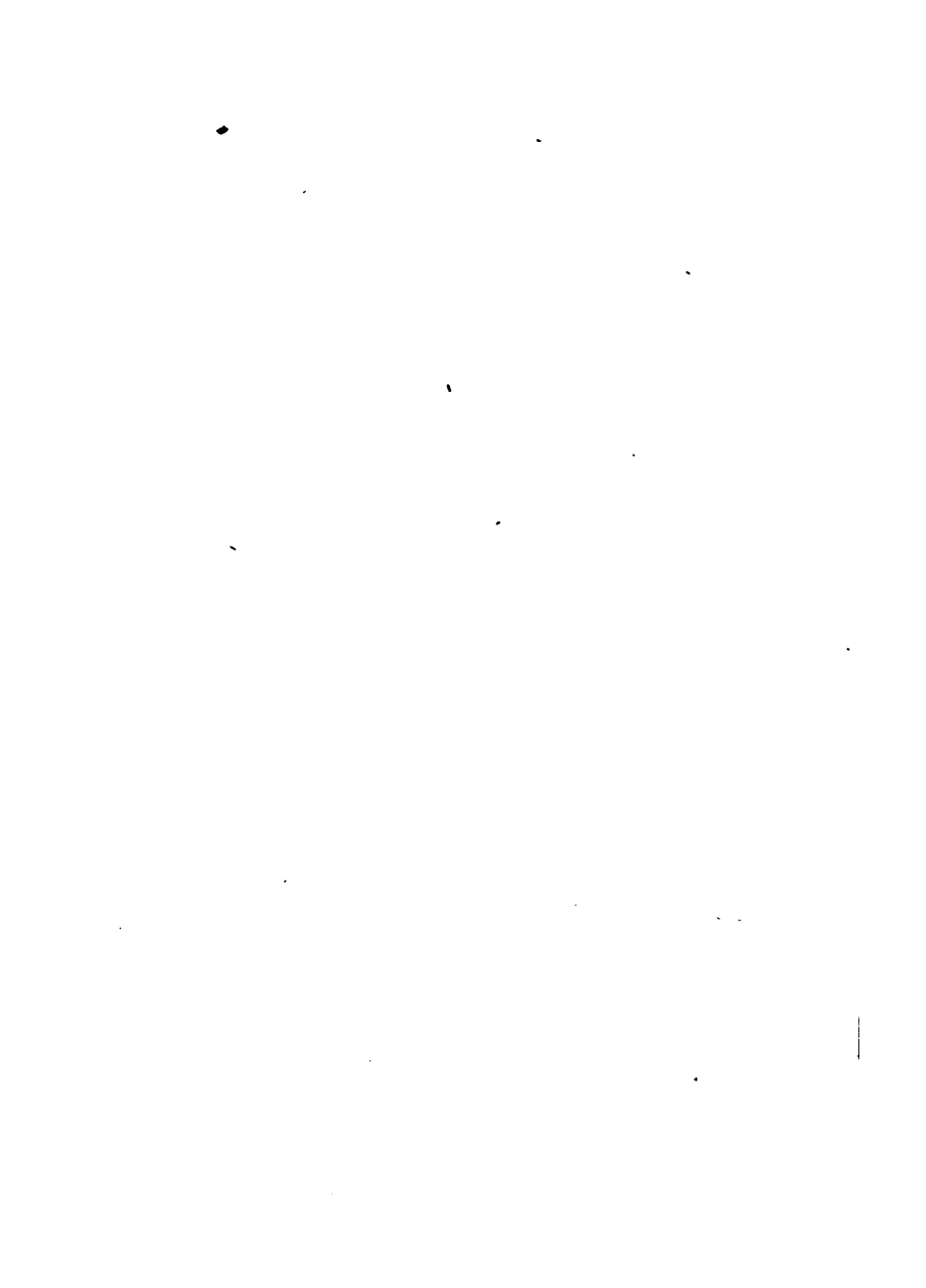


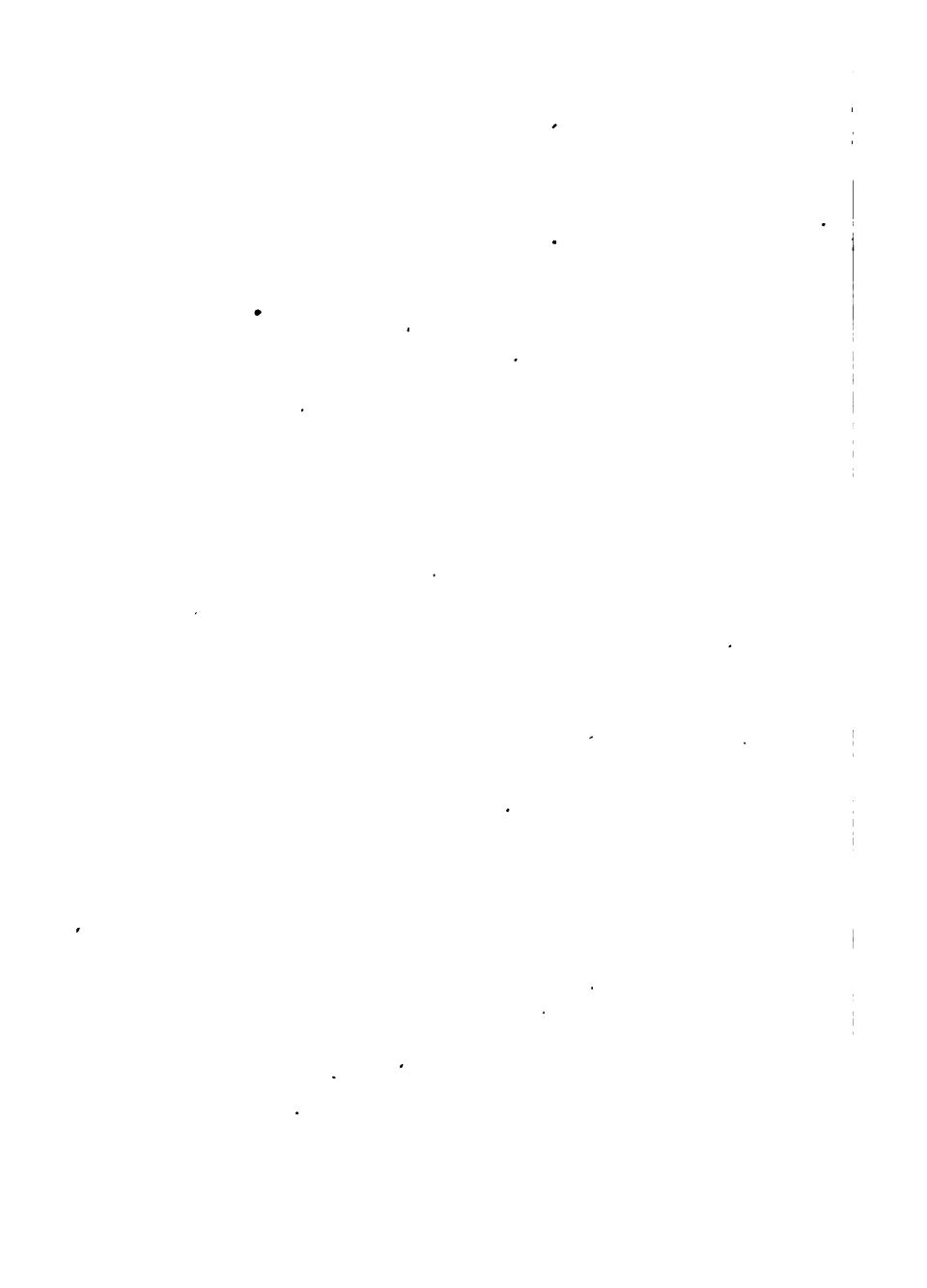
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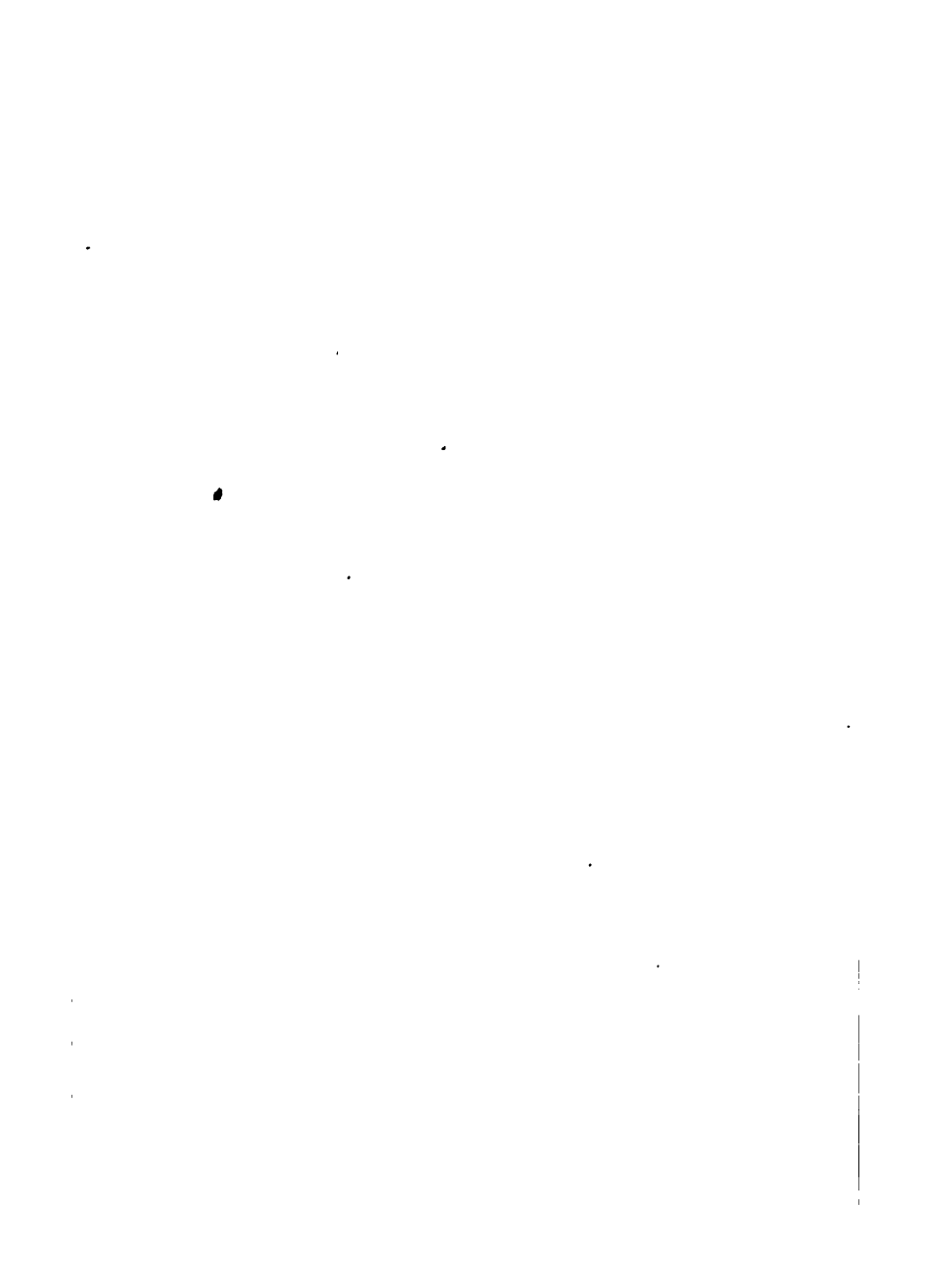
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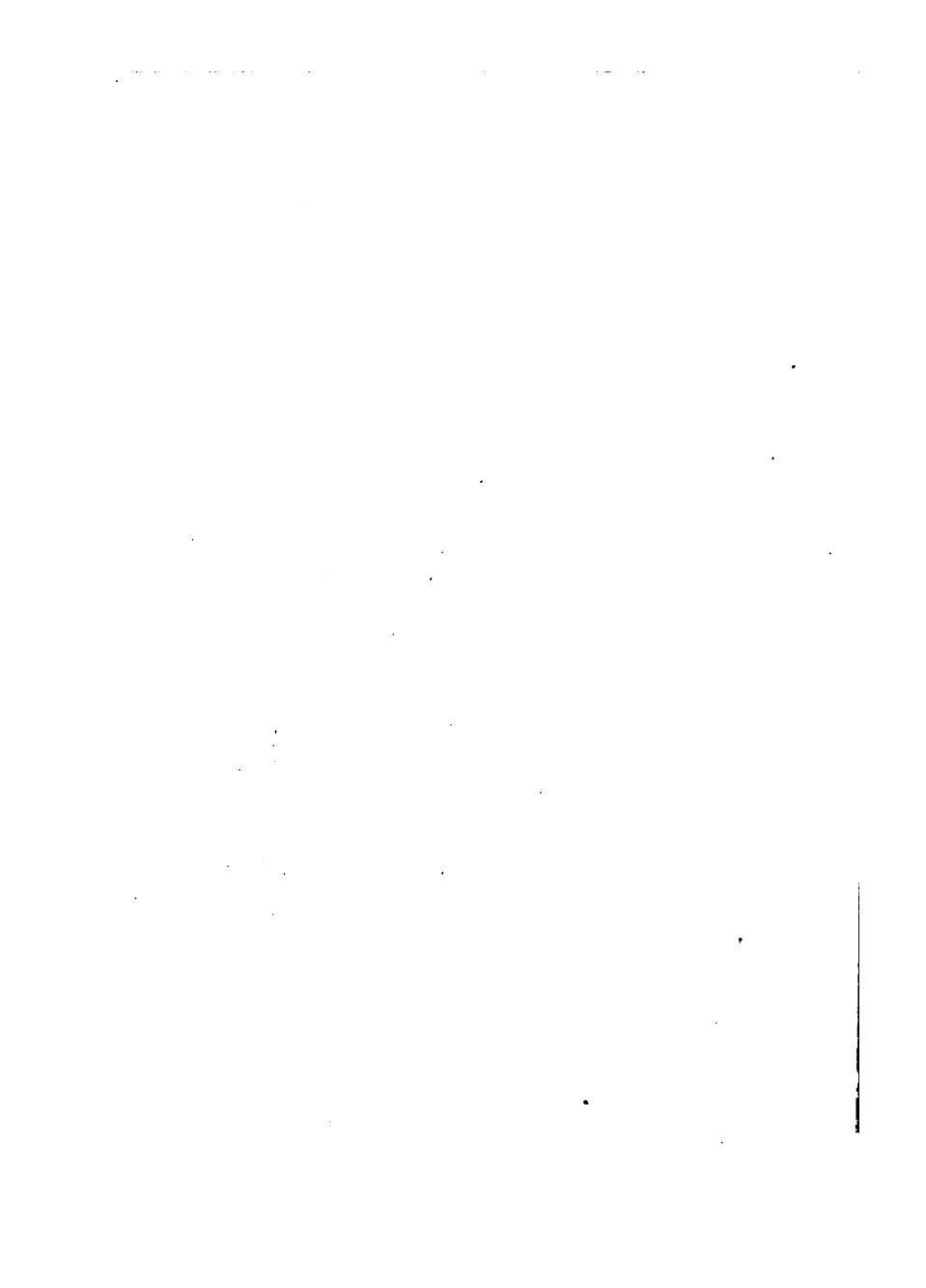






NED WRIGHT.







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PREFACE.

NED WRIGHT'S life is altogether so remarkable as rarely to be paralleled. Its early part was marked by such strong tendencies to evil, and such confirmed habits of crime, as almost to forbid all hope of reformation, whilst the latter part—extending over ten years—has presented the widest possible contrast. Not only have evil propensities been curbed and criminal habits conquered, but the whole current of his strong and earnest nature has been turned into the channel of ceaseless effort for reclaiming the degraded and lost. His transformation, combined with his earnest and constant zeal to diffuse the glad tidings of the Gospel, whose happy influence he has himself experienced, is not less remarkable as a result of Divine power than the case of St. Paul, or Augustine, or Bunyan. Ned Wright, as he is,

contrasted with what he was, is a resistless proof of the truth and power of Christianity. His conversion has not been a solitary fact, without influence or Divine surroundings. His zeal has not been in vain, nor have his efforts been fruitless. Not only in the metropolis, but throughout the country, many have been arrested in their evil ways, awakened to solemn thought, and restored to God. Of this many striking instances will be found in the following "Story of his Life."

His sale of Bibles and other religious publications, the mission-rooms he has opened in several localities in London, his suppers and mothers' meetings, and a variety of other Christian agencies he has set on foot, have produced, and are still producing, results which cannot be too highly estimated, and which will be known in their full extent only on the great day of account.

Ned Wright's life is, moreover, not only remarkable for the moral and spiritual change effected by the Gospel, but for the intellectual transformation which has followed. At first, when reclaimed, he could barely read a few words in the New Testament, and

could only speak in broken and imperfect sentences. Now he can speak so as to command the attention, not only of the multitudes that gather to hear him, but of the cultured and educated. Further, as may be seen in "The Pilgrims' Hymn-Book," compiled by him, he writes hymns of which our best hymnologists might not be ashamed.*

To secure, therefore, for the remarkable Story of Ned Wright's Life a wider circulation, and wider usefulness, the publishers have deemed it advisable to issue this condensed and cheaper People's Edition.

Paternoster Row, June 21st, 1873.

* Specimen of hymns:—

- 1 'Twas love that moved Thy tender heart
From the delights of heaven to part,
And meet for me the tempter's dart.
Yes, Jesus *loved* me !
- 2 My sins for judgment loudly cried ;
Baptized in blood my Saviour died ;
Trusting in Him I'm justified.
Yes, Jesus *died* for me !
- 3 All hell, the world, and flesh unite
Against the Christ of God to fight,
But could not stay His upward flight.
Yes, Jesus *rose* for me !
- 4 With holy hands before the throne,
And sprinkled blood, He doth atone
For daily faults to which I'm prone.
Yes, Jesus *lives* for me !

- 5 The day will come, and may be near,
When deck'd with glory He'll appear,
To take me home, and banish fear.
Yes, Jesus *comes* for me !
- 6 Hail ! happy moment, longed-for prize !
Begone, vain world ! my soul, arise :
" Well done ! " awaits me in the skies.
Yes, Jesus *welcomes* me !

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THE LIFE OF NED WRIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

Early days at Bankside.—Curious cure for the whooping-cough.—
Expelled several day-schools.—Employed at breaking up barges.
—"Ayes" or "Noes": a conflict with conscience.—Attends the
theatre.—On board a coal ship to Hartlepool.—A Jonah on board.
—Return home.

EDWARD WRIGHT was born in Lambeth on the 28th of July, 1836. His parents belonged to humble life, his father being a journeyman barge-builder, amiable and honest, but until his conversion was occasionally intemperate. This event happened when Edward—or, as he is now familiarly called, Ned—was a child. The family lived in Pitt's Place, Bankside, where they occupied a small house, part of which they let. The banks of the Thames being much lower than at present, the high tides caused considerable inconvenience and dismay. On one occasion the tide was very high, and with the exception of a female lodger, the mother and child were in the house alone; and when the water ran in by the doorway, and began to cover the floor, she cried for assistance to a man who came in a boat down the court. He, however, rowed on to the rescue of his own family, and Mrs. Wright was compelled to entreat the services of the lodger upstairs, and offered to forego all claims for rent if she would rescue

her and her child. This was done, although the water in the room reached above the knees, and rose yet higher before the tide began to fall. Ned's father had endeavoured to make his way home by holding on to the railings of New Park Street Chapel, and walking along the brickwork. Suddenly, however, the top of the rails gave way, and he, falling into the water, had to wade through it, and so reach home. Soon after this occurrence, impelled by motives of curiosity, he ventured with his wife into the chapel where the late Rev. James Smith, the author of well-known devotional works, was preaching. Both were that evening converted to God, and immediately the home presented a different aspect. The father ceased from his drunken habits; the Bible was read, and a blessing asked upon the provisions of the table.

As a child Ned was noted for insensibility to danger, and although regarded as a favourite, he was permitted to play at the edge of the river. On one occasion he was nearly drowned, and being severely hurt he was taken home insensible, and appeared to be dying. Having rallied, he was seized with the whooping-cough, which was cured in a singular way. His father, adopting the advice of friends who evidently believed in the rough-and-ready mode of cure, took him in a boat, and rowed him through the arch of Blackfriars Bridge against wind and tide; whilst passing through he fell into a severe fit of coughing, during which his father compelled him to face the wind; and this method of treatment, which might have killed another boy, cured him. He soon showed a propensity for fighting; for he quarrelled with a neighbour's child, and struck her who subsequently became his wife. From fighting he advanced to other feats of juvenile daring. It was in vain his father, fearing he might fall into mischief through staying out late in the evening, watched his actions more narrowly. Though he was taken to chapel, and admitted into New Park Street Sun-

day School, accompanied his father on his rounds in the neighbourhood as a tract distributor, and often heard the simple utterances of his parent's devout heart at the prayer-meetings held in his house, his disposition to evil increased. He could not be kept at school ; whatever school he entered he was repeatedly reprimanded for bad conduct, and ultimately expelled. His father succeeded in getting him into the Blue School in Southwark ; but before he had been there long enough to entitle him to the quaint costume of the school he decamped. He was then sent to a school connected with a Congregational Chapel ; but at the beginning of the second quarter, instead of taking the fees to his master as requested, he spent them with his companions upon curds and whey and cake. For this he was chastised ; and while he was being punished a neighbour expressed her satisfaction therewith. This aroused his ire, and, vowing vengeance against the woman, he resolved to throw a large knife at her ; in attempting to carry out his designs he fell with his head against a brick wall, making a deep gash in the top part, at least two inches long, the scars of which remain to this day. It was about this time that young Wright was treated for disease of the liver, and the doctors gave him up as incurable, believing that, if he reached the age of fourteen, he would never see the year of his majority.

Ned's father finding employment in Battersea, the family removed thither ; and Ned was sent to school. But so incorrigible and hardened was he that the schoolmaster found it impossible to keep him any longer, and once again he was expelled. His father thereupon resolved to find him a little employment at home, and send him to a night-school. Accordingly an old barge was bought, broken up, and carted home, and Ned was left to chop it up, and dispose of it in penny and twopenny lots. The sight of the money proved too great a temptation, and he fell a victim to it. Again he was punished ; but, un-

deterred, he continued his evil practices, until he was recognized by the neighbours as "a pest of a boy."

It must have been with no little anxiety that his parents put him to work. He was first employed to chop wood or a publican ; he was then engaged at four shillings per week to frighten birds and follow the plough ; and afterwards laboured in the yard where his father was employed, but so irregularly as to cause him great sorrow and perplexity. He was soon discharged, being accused of stealing half a sovereign which he had as change. Four days afterwards he met a "running man," who was then training to run a race, and Ned, with other lads, ran with him. The man, evidently pleased with the lad's agility, gave him half a pint of ale, which intoxicated him. When he recovered he found that some one had untied his handkerchief, and opened his waistcoat ; and, as he was about to button the latter, he felt something like a piece of metal between the button-holes, which he discovered to be the half-sovereign he was supposed to have stolen. The youth was not so hardened in crime as to refuse to listen to the whisperings of conscience, and he was for some time undecided as to whether he should take the money to its rightful owner or not. He balanced the reasons for and against with much skill ; but the "Noes" had it. The half-sovereign was spent in a few days, and shared with his evil associates. With the view to deliver his son from his bad companions, the father found work, and removed to Rotherhithe. Here Ned was sent to a Wesleyan Sunday School, and was so impressed by witnessing the funeral of a scholar there that hopes were entertained of a favourable change in the lad's feelings. The impression did not last long, and on the Thursday evening following he took one of his mother's brass candlesticks, hid it in the yard, struck it with a large hammer against a stone, which doubled it up, and then he took it to a ragshop, and obtained for it, as old brass, the sum of fourpence.

Like most boys, he had heard the story of "Jack Sheppard," or some one of the many versions of the story which has had such mischievous effects upon young lads. Many a thief has received his first education in his business at the penny gaff or theatre, where the play of "Jack Sheppard" arouses all the enthusiasm of the vitiated tastes of the boys of London. Ned only required a little stimulus to make him a skilful and habitual thief, and this he found one evening at a theatre in the south of London, where the play was being performed. It was his first visit to a theatre. "I was not a little startled at the glaring gas and scenery," says Ned; "and as I watched the performance I well remember how often I fancied I could have got over the top of the walls of that house as well as Jack Sheppard did, and I am sure I was taught that night a way to thieve, and escape without being caught, that I was not acquainted with before." He did not leave the theatre until twelve o'clock, and it was not until one in the morning that he reached home, where he found his mother sorrowfully watching for him.

In all his unsettled evil habits he was not happy. Fear at times seized his buoyant spirits, and as he heard of the imprisonment for twenty-one days of a companion he trembled lest such a fate might happen to him. Hungry and weary, he repented of his unfeeling conduct towards the parents who had made numberless efforts for his reformation. Without food the whole of one day he was glad to pick up a number of old nails from the shore to obtain one half-penny, with which to purchase dry crusts. The baker filled his cap with pieces of bread, some of which were quite mouldy; and sitting down upon a doorstep he ate with tears, but not with relish, the dry bread he had purchased. He resolved to wander to some spot where, in the dull light of the evening, his mother would be sure to pass; and when the poor woman met her ragged and deplorable son she burst into tears of deepest grief.

Not daring to take him home, she arranged for his staying all night at a neighbour's house ; and in a few days his father prevailed upon a pilot to get his unruly son into a ship in the coal trade. As Ned had learned to row with some skill the captain consented, and so he proceeded on board the *Ann of Hartlepool*, which place was to be her destination.

It was a beautiful day when he first stepped upon the vessel's deck, and the voyage promised to be pleasant and satisfactory. Up to the time of reaching Gravesend Ned had been running about the ship's rigging like a wild cat, when a breeze suddenly setting in the ship rolled heavily, and the young sailor fell sick, and began to curse his fate. Added to the pangs of a troubled conscience, he had to bear the reproaches of the captain and men, who likened him to Jonah, and offered to make some whale a present of him. This, it would seem, greatly disturbed him, for he clearly remembered the story of "Jonah in the whale's belly," which he had heard in the Sabbath-school ; and when the ship reached its destination one of the sailors terrified him by observing, "Now, old fellow, we mean to sell you and the ship together to the devil, and in a few days you may make up your mind to go down to Davy Jones's locker," which is supposed to be situated at the bottom of the sea. The captain and the men left the ship with a broom at her masthead, signifying that she was for sale, Ned remaining on board, eating the remains of "salt junk" and biscuits. "At the end of the week," he says, "having visited several ships, whose men very kindly gave me a little to eat, I was compelled from destitution to beg my way from door to door in the town of Hartlepool ; this lasted for about ten days, when I at length persuaded the captain of a vessel, called the *Stokesley of Stockton*, to give me a passage to London ; but we had only just fairly got out to sea when I again fell a victim to sea-sickness." The ship being heavily laden, he had to

lie about her decks both night and day, being cuffed and beaten by the sailors, who were anxious to get him out of the vessel altogether. When they had reached half-way reach, one of the sailors, who thus desired to be rid of his company, seeing a "billy-buoy," or one-masted vessel, coming up the river, advised him to ask the captain to grant him a passage to London. This he did, and having gained permission he was soon on board. "When I reached the deck of the 'billy-buoy' her captain said that up to that very moment they had had a most beautiful passage; but from the day of my arrival on board, the ship was in constant trouble; for no sooner were we clear of one ship than we ran foul of another, and by high water, instead of being near London Bridge, we were only opposite the town of Woolwich; and then, turning to me, the captain said, 'If we never had a Jonah on board before we have certainly got one now; for we haven't had a bit of luck since you reached the ship; and so the sooner you get upon the shore the better I shall like it.'" Having picked up a small sailor's chest in the river, he resolved to take it ashore with him, to sell it at Woolwich; but before leaving the "billy-buoy" he put thirty of the captain's biscuits into it. At the arsenal gates he was stopped by several policemen, who demanded to know what he had inside the chest upon his shoulder; but ultimately he was allowed to pass, and after selling the box in the town he walked on to London, puzzling his brains as to how he could account for his return home. On his return work was procured for him with his father, and for some few weeks he conducted himself properly, bringing home the money he earned, and resolving to labour honestly and with diligence. His weakness was not idleness, nor can it be said that he ever lacked in industrial enterprise, but his love of mischief was ever a prevailing passion.

CHAPTER II.

Apprenticed as a waterman.—Seized with cholera.—A blasphemer taken at his word.

THE good resolutions which Ned had formed immediately upon his return from the unlucky voyage were soon forgotten. Unfortunately he was surrounded by evil companions, who rejoiced in his daring spirit, and urged him to attempt bolder deeds than he had yet committed.

Ned's father had bound him apprentice as a waterman ; and in order to secure the approval of the Waterman's Company he was compelled to go for one month to a night-school, to learn to write. To him this was a difficult task, and although not succeeding very well, he managed to be able to write his name intelligibly. He again lost his employment, and so was thrown more hopelessly into the path of ruin. The restrictions of home became increasingly irksome : his father's admonitions and prayers made him wretched, and he longed to get away from those who sought so earnestly and persistently to restrain him in his evil courses. His mother's heart continually vibrated between hope and fear ; at one time she was buoyed up with the hope that prayer would be answered ; at another, she sank into despondency and sorrow. Often did she creep out of her bedroom in the small hours of the morning to let her prodigal son in at the window, when his father had locked him out ; and hour after hour, in the loneliness of her grief, would she lie awake, listening for the sound of the footstep she knew

so well, and had yearned to hear so long. When he was out she feared he would be locked up, and if he did not return during the night she would make inquiries early in the morning at the police-station, in order that, if he had got into mischief, she might be present at the court, and, should a fine be inflicted, save him the humiliation of gaol-life.

During one of his adventures he was seized with cholera, and though he felt himself to be an outcast and a vagabond, and unworthy to enter his mother's roof, yet where could he go but to that home he should never have left? But what was his surprise and disappointment when he reached the house to find it unoccupied—no cheerful light to guide him to its welcome hospitality, no tender mother to succour him in his sufferings! He knew many of his neighbours, but none to give him shelter. Then he remembered having heard that his father had removed to Bankside, a fact of which he took no notice at the time, but which he gladly thought of now he was suffering from weakness and pain. The distance was considerable; but it must be walked, and that quickly, for fear the police, who knew him well, might arrest him upon some charge. Never did he feel his loneliness more than at that hour. His companions had forsaken him in the crisis of difficulty and distress, and there was no one to help the poor doubled-up man to crawl along the streets to his father's home. Stopping at a public-house he knocked loudly, hoping to purchase brandy to give him some relief from his agony; but the landlord had retired to rest, and would not wait upon him. His agony was so great that he felt like a maniac; he would have given anything for a bed and shelter; but he must crawl yet farther, and farther still, or die like a dog in the street within the reach of the policeman whom he both feared and detested. At length he found a public-house open, and having swallowed six-pennyworth of brandy he resumed his journey. The

brandy, however, gave him no ease ; his pains seemed to increase, and he could scarcely walk upright. He was afraid to take the main road lest he should be observed by the police ; and whenever he heard their footsteps in the distance he was compelled to seek shelter in some quiet alley. An hour and a half was spent in this way, and when he reached his mother's door he fell helplessly on the step. In vain he essayed to reach the knocker—all strength had departed ; he could only groan. Those groans were loud enough to secure the attention of any one who might be awake ; but apparently all were asleep, and yet the mother had a quick ear for her son's misery, and as she lay in bed she fancied the faint sounds that proceeded from the door were those of her child. She tapped at the window, but it was only answered by a deeper groan ; she opened it, and called out, but Ned could only respond with another groan. The poor fellow presented a pitiable appearance when found upon the doorstep, drawn up with cramp, and in awful torture. The doctor was summoned ; every means adopted to give relief, and at last the malady yielded to the curative appliances. Throughout the time he was thus carefully tended by the whole family no word of reproach was uttered by his parents, and he was so astonished at the kind treatment he received that it led him to deep reflection, and for the time he seemed humbled. His manner of life had courted the severest reproof, and his want of affection had been so marked that he was surprised not to receive some word of reproach. Such unexpected and undeserved consideration won his admiration, and he resolved that for the future he would behave differently. He kept his vows while he was sick, but broke them almost as soon as he recovered. He soon found his old habits to have a stronger hold upon him than his mother's affection. It happened unto him, as the apostle Peter said, "According to the old proverb, The dog is returned to his own

vomit again ; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

This was not the only warning he received at this period of his life.

Having been brought up at the river-side, he not unnaturally took great delight in the Thames, and even at the early age of fifteen he was considered to be an expert swimmer. Some of his companions were to him objects of envy for their daring. He had frequently watched, with high glee and with great envy, a courageous lad, who loved to climb up a ship's rigging with the agility of a monkey, then to sit on the truck of the masthead, strip off his clothes, throwing them down on the deck, and descending in a state of nudity, jump fearlessly from the rigging into the river, and, after swimming for a time, return to the vessel. Sometimes this lad would go to the masthead of a collier, and slide down some of the backstays head-foremost. Ned soon began to venture upon like feats, and in many instances he succeeded, while at times he placed himself in positions of extreme difficulty and danger. Not that he calculated upon danger, or was deterred in his acts of daring by fear ; and the more others attempted to imitate him the more anxious was he to excel. It was about this time that an event occurred which he has never forgotten, which, indeed, he has often related in public as illustrating the word of our Lord, "One shall be taken, and the other left."

One summer's day, while attending to some pitch that was being boiled on the shore of the river, several of his companions came down to bathe. The tide was fast ebbing, and the shore was getting dry ; however, fearing the police, they got into a coal-barge and undressed themselves. There was an artificial bed where this barge lay, and at the outside a campshear or kind of wooden quay, beyond which was deep water. One by one the lads got

into the water on the side where it was shallow ; but one who was more venturesome than the rest, named Larney, an older lad than Ned, made for the stern, where a rope hung over the side of the barge. Larney was one of those fierce young spirits whom no discipline could tame, and had gained an unenviable notoriety in Rotherhithe as an incorrigible thief, liar, and blackguard ; even his own associates both feared and disliked him, although he was regarded as their leader. Knowing he could not swim, they entreated him not to go outside the campshear ; but he only answered with a volley of oaths, requesting them to leave him alone. They ran towards him as he lowered himself by the rope over the side of the barge, and persuaded and threatened and warned him ; but his only reply was, " I'll chance it ; if I don't, I'll be ——." Letting go the rope with one of his hands, he began to search for the campshear, but in vain ; and while he was thus clinging to the rope with one hand he grew alarmed, and, endeavouring with both hands to haul himself up again, the rope slipped, and he fell into the water, and sank to the bottom. The tide was running out very strong, and carried him into greater depths. Immediately the cry was raised, " A lad overboard ! " The watermen at the stairs were lounging about, some sheltering themselves from the intense heat, while others were asleep in their boats. The cry for help aroused them all, including Ned, who, leaving his pitch pot, ran hurriedly to the scene. When he arrived there he found that Larney had sunk a second time ; and as he perceived two fingers of a man's hand on the surface of the water, Ned would not wait to take off his clothes, but plunged into the river, and diving beneath, seized the drowning lad as he was again sinking. The moment Larney felt the touch of his rescuer's hand he laid hold of him, placed his arms and legs around Ned's, leaving him powerless either to help himself or Larney. It was a critical moment, requiring

great self-possession, determination, and skill, and a desperate effort, which only a strong man could make. But Ned was equal to it. He struggled to get his legs free, and having succeeded, though with great difficulty, he made another effort to disengage himself from the lad's death hug, and as he was losing his consciousness his body was seen to rise to the surface. The watermen seized him by his hair, and dragged him, in an insensible state, to a boat ; but Larney was drowned.

The excitement of the crowd that had gathered on the shore was intense ; every one admired and applauded the heroism of young Wright, and the anxiety for his recovery from insensibility was universal. His father felt proud of his son, and listened with no little satisfaction to the applause which greeted his bravery. As for Ned, even in the lowest state of debasement into which he descended, he sympathized with human suffering, and was always ready to display his skill and strength in rescuing any one from perilous positions. He is not the first daring sinner who has put all the better enthusiasm of his nature into the service of God when that service has been preferred to zeal for Satan. As a good soldier of Christ he has learnt to "endure hardness," and to fight bravely for the good and the true.

Larney's body was not recovered until three days afterwards, and among the followers of his remains to the grave was he who, but for the merciful Providence that watched over his life, might have been buried by the side of the drowned man. His high spirits, however, were not tamed ; and while others felt impressed with the solemnity of the occasion, Ned felt no fear. When he was told by a companion that it was through God's mercy he had not been drowned as well as Larney, he replied with the utmost indifference, " If the — fool had not let go the rope he would have been here now." A more "darkened understanding" no man, surely, ever

had ; alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in him, because of the blindness of his heart, the man who had thus been brought into close proximity with death still continued to have no fear of God before his eyes. He was as resolute a sinner as ever.

CHAPTER III.

Imprisonment.—On the treadmill in old Brixton prison.—A cunning trick.—Release.—Becomes a soldier, and escapes.—A prize fight.—Imprisoned in Newgate.—Turning "hundreds and thousands."
—Contrivance secretly to communicate with a fellow-prisoner.
—A father's love.

ON one occasion he was sentenced to twenty-one days in old Brixton prison. "Accordingly," he says, "in the evening of that day I was conducted, with half a dozen others who were convicted of similar offences, into one of Her Majesty's royal carriages, which contained about eight little compartments, just large enough for one person to sit down in ; and when we had started upon our journey some of the company, evidently intent upon making the most of their present opportunity, began to sing a song, the chorus of which I joined in with vigour." When the prisoners were within ten minutes' ride of the old prison the carriage stopped, and the policeman who had been sitting outside opened the door, and inquired what they were disposed to drink before entering the "palace," as it was denominated by the "company" within. Orders for certain stimulants were delivered to those who could pay for them ; the driver and "footman" participating in the luxuries thus provided. Up to the time of his imprisonment Ned had been sustained by the advice of "Witty" to be firm ; but now, shut up in a lonely cell for twenty-one days, and having to work every day very hard for small supplies of bread and soup, his courage failed him ; and remember-

ing the home and comforts he had left behind, he gave vent to tears, and indeed spent very restless nights.

The second day of his imprisonment he was introduced to the treadmill, which was known among the prisoners as "the stepper." Among the twenty or thirty men and boys who worked on this wheel were several noted pickpockets; and one day one of these, more daring than the rest, offered to lay a wager that he could pick the turnkey's pocket of a portion of hard tobacco which he was in the habit of carrying in his waistcoat pocket. "The bet was made with a fellow-prisoner whilst we were performing our task; and the next day, about three o'clock in the afternoon, the old gentleman (the turnkey) sat down upon his seat, and had what he called 'forty winks,' during the enjoyment of which the pickpocket, taking his turn with the others from the seat to the wheel, had to pass the turnkey, and in doing so he politely drew from the left-hand pocket of his waistcoat the coveted piece of tobacco. I need scarcely say that the men on the wheel at the time were in ecstasies; but the most curious part of the affair was, that although the turnkey upon waking felt for his tobacco, he never at any future period made reference to his loss.

When his term of imprisonment had expired Ned was met outside by his aunt, who took him to her house, gave him a good beefsteak, with bread and coffee; and earnestly urged him, as she had often done before, to forsake his evil ways, and to begin to serve another and a better Master. He learnt that his father would not permit his mother to meet him outside the prison gates that day, lest his neighbours should conclude that he in any way approved of his son's conduct. Leaving his aunt, Ned joined himself again to his old associates in Rotherhithe, to whom he related his experiences in prison. As for regret or shame at his disgrace, he lost it all in the presence of those who persuaded him to believe he was a hero,

who was as worthy of respect as though he had returned full of honours to his native home, after having fought bravely for his country.

He left Rotherhithe, and, in an assumed name, became a soldier. Having accepted the bounty money, and obtained his clothing, he was, of course, expected to attend and learn the drill. But from the first he felt averse to the duties he had accepted, and became a source of great trouble to the drill-serjeant, an amusing Irishman, who had no patience with Ned's conduct. Observing the new recruit stooping one day on the grounds, he went up to him, saying, "Arrah, sir, what's the matter wid ye now?" "Oh, sir," replied the ever ready Ned, "I've got the stomach-ache." On which the shrewd Irishman observed, as he put his hand to Ned's chin, and attempted to straighten him out of his double position, "Sure, C——, you're one of the Queen's bad bargains;" and seizing him by the back of his neck, and amidst the laughter of the soldiers, he was hurled on one side, and bidden to join "the awkward squad." This kind of life and of treatment soon disgusted the raw recruit, who seized the first opportunity to return to London.

To his parents he vowed that he would alter his course of living, and settle down quietly and honourably; and on this condition he was permitted to return to his home. For a little time he seemed to abide faithfully by this resolution; but the old spirit of lawless rebellion still remained within him, and once again he courted some of his old companions. The irresistible charms of a bonfire on the fifth of November won him fairly into the enchanted circle he had for a time forsaken; and it was whilst in the old society, witnessing the commemoration of "Guy Fawkes' Day," that a quarrel arose between him and a young man, which it was decided should be fairly fought out in true British fashion.

Both combatants were well acquainted with what is

called "scientific pugilism"; and although Ned was never recognized as a professional prize-fighter by the society that is organized for the purpose of aiding and abetting this brutal pastime, yet, as we shall hereafter show, he subsequently fought a prize-fight. His encounter on the present occasion was, however, preliminary, and gave him a taste for the ring. The fight continued for an hour, during which the hitting was very savage, and at the close Wright was pronounced to be the victor. He was soon booked for an encounter with another adversary, who, however, failed to come forward at the last moment with the full deposit, in consequence of which the previous deposits were handed over to Wright.

Then followed his celebrated fight with Harry Cooper, who was known at that time to be "very clever with the gloves." The whole of the deposits being made for this fight, the combatants with their friends repaired to a field, where a ring was extemporized, and the fight commenced. It had not long proceeded before Ned received so severe a blow on his nose as to break it, a disfigurement which remains to this day, as will be seen by his photographs. Wright has described this encounter in many of his addresses to the lowest classes as having continued for two hours and a quarter, at the end of which he says, "we had become so blind as not to be able to see out of our eyes; and my second, understanding his work, whispered in my ear, 'Take five paces into the middle of the ring, Ned, and then hit straight out from the shoulder'; this I did for about ten minutes more, when the sponge was thrown up in my favour. On our arrival home it was very much feared that I should lose my sight; my head being like a pumpkin, it was so very much swollen. I had hardly arrived, however, at the Ship public-house when my poor mother, again coming to my rescue, fearful lest I should be hurried from such a dreadful scene into eternity, took me home, and bathed

my eyes and face, contriving also to keep me without any work until I got better."

Shortly after he was committed to Newgate. His prison experiences we give in his own graphic words ; for, although no writer, Ned has the gift of telling graphically his own story :—

"On arriving at Newgate the scene was quite different from what I had expected ; for, although obliged to be bathed and searched, they did not take my own clothes from me ; and on going to rest at night I was surprised to find that my bed was a large door-mat, laid in the rack, after the style of sailors' berths. Here I met with a young man companion, who turned out to be one of the cleverest pickpockets in London ; and he declared to me that he was innocent of the crime with which he was charged, that of attempting to pick a gentleman's pocket of his handkerchief. I shall never forget this poor fellow, who anticipated being found guilty at the sessions. His trial came on the same day as mine, and I remember we all proceeded along a narrow passage from our ward, near where all the executed criminals are buried, to a cell at the bottom of the stairs, leading up to the dock of the court. It was this poor fellow's turn to go up before me, and after about half an hour he returned down the steps, clasping his hands together as he did so, exclaiming 'Seven years ! seven years !! seven years !!! and all for nothing !'

"My turn coming next, I proceeded up the stairs into the dock. This being my first appearance at the Central Criminal Court, I seemed for a moment confused, and as one witness after another appeared to give evidence against me, the chain of which was so firmly linked together that, when their testimony was complete, the jury returned a verdict of 'guilty' without leaving their box ; but the judge, considering my father and mother's respectability, passed upon me the lenient sentence of three calendar months'

imprisonment at Wandsworth Gaol. In proceeding back again we passed a room where I saw that my new friend had changed his clothes for the prison dress, and had very evidently been weeping bitterly ; and after I had passed this man his sobs were so loud that I could distinctly hear them.

“ Next day a carriage-load of us proceeded to the New Model Prison at Wandsworth, and, on my alighting from the carriage, I confronted a gentleman that I first knew as a schoolmaster at old Brixton prison, who said, rather humorously, ‘ Hallo, Wright, what, come home again? how long for, pray, this time?’ ‘ A drag’ (*i.e.* three months), said I, when, after some good advice, I proceeded to the baths, and then to the scale-room, where, with my prison dress in my arms, I was weighed ; after which, having dressed myself, I was directed to my cell, the number of which was ‘ D 1—10.’

“ I had not been there very long when the turnkey came in, and showing me an apparatus that looked like a mangle in the cell, he remarked, ‘ There, that’s what we call hundreds and thousands.’ This, I found the next day, I had to turn with all my might in order to make the pendulum of the clock attached to it move, which would not do so until so many thousand turns were made. If this had been an ordinary clock I should have smashed it to pieces a thousand times over. A portion of old rope was rolled into my cell shortly after, and I began to pick this into oakum, until my fingers were fairly sore ; but no extra food did I receive for my hard work. Now came a fresh move. I had next morning to go out to what they call ‘ the pumps,’ and when there I found I had to take a little box to myself, and work alone ; for these cranks were connected one with the other, and I found out very soon, by bitter experience, that if I did not move round as quickly as the other prisoners the warder on duty would hear a sort of clicking noise, and he would then report me

for neglecting my task. For this we were mostly punished by having to spend two or three days in the dark cells, which is not the pleasantest part of the prison to live in, for you have to do without your bed until nine o'clock at night, and then it is taken away again at four o'clock in the morning. This was one of the most trying 'bouts I ever had, suffering as I did the greater part of the time from the toothache, and eventually being obliged to have some of the teeth taken out.

"Fancying one day by a man's walk that I knew him, I concocted a scheme by which I might really know, it being impossible to recognize any one, every man's clothes being alike, and each man wearing a mask. The prison waste paper is previously dipped in a chemical solution to prevent us from smoking it, thus depriving us of every chance of indulgence of any kind. But one morning, on going out to the pumps, I found thick grease upon a portion of the machinery of the cranks, and on the work being over I brought a little of this away upon my fingers'-ends, and in passing along I picked up a small stick of wood about the size of a match, the end of which I bit until it became almost like a brush, and then dipping it into my patent ink, I wrote on a piece of waste paper these words, 'Ned Wright, next cell'; and on coming back to my cell next morning from chapel—we had to go there every morning—in passing my friend's domicile I threw this funny note inside. The following day, on our way to chapel, a voice whispered in my ear, 'Are you Ned Wright from Rotherhithe?' 'Yes,' said I. 'Are you Mike S——?' Nodding his head, I understood that I was right in my conjecture, and said, 'How long have you got?' when he answered, 'Two years.'

"After this, until we were removed into different cells, we used every opportunity we could get of communicating with one another by signs, having no one to speak to being a great privation to us, and the chance of making

yourself known to any one, and thus beguiling away the time, being a great relief to the mind in such a place.

“At length, after three calendar months, my clothes were again shifted, and I received my discharge.”

Leaving prison, he was full of expectations, as most prisoners are, of being greeted by a few of his old companions. As he stood upon the stone steps of the dreary building which could never be associated with the pleasant memories of home, feeling an inexpressible relief at having left so dreary a world behind, he looked upon the world outside, wondering what there was in it which would minister to his joy. Were there any who cared for Ned Wright sufficiently to cheer him now in his loneliness? Was there not one solitary friend who had shared his gains, and had rejoiced in his prosperity, to shake his hand, and congratulate him upon the end of his imprisonment? At a little distance from the huge gate, under the frowning arch of which he now stood, were a group of men and women waiting for the appearance of some of their friends; but they were unknown to the one released prisoner who stood gazing wistfully upon them. “I wonder how it is,” thought he pensively, “that none of my old pals have come to meet me?” Full of these thoughts, with empty pockets, meanly clad in clothes that had in them many a rent and many a patch, he started forth to walk—whither he knew not. So awful a feeling of isolation in the midst of life made him wretched and despairing.

He had not taken many steps before he espied an aged grey-headed man, with a bundle under his arm, walking steadily towards the prison. Ned’s heart sank within him as he saw it was the same good old man who years before had placed his gentle hands upon his unruly boy’s head, and prayed, “O God, help me to plead with Thee until this boy of mine become converted.” Those were quick steps that the ragged prodigal son took to go to his father, and it was the instinct of a better conscience that led him

to ask for his forgiveness. And the father had brought the best robe he could afford, that his son might not begin life again in the tattered clothing of crime. That wonderful parental affection which Scripture uses to illustrate the unquenchable love of God—"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him"—was richly displayed to the erring son. "Yes, I forgive you," he tearfully exclaimed, after having heard the accents of penitence; "but don't do it again, or you will send me and your poor mother with our grey hairs sorrowing to the grave." And so they walked, silent and sorrowful, to a neighbouring coach-house yard, where Ned speedily exchanged his old rags for the bran new clothes provided by a father's love.

Surely he will not transgress again.

CHAPTER IV.

Nearly married.—Becomes a pot-boy.—And a sailor.—In Maidstone gaol.—A fight in the prison yard.—On board the *Alacrity*.—Ned is flogged.—“Holy-stone decks.”—Further offences and punishments.—In a storm.—Escape from ship.—Certificate of service.

ALL went on smoothly for a time, until Ned had renewed acquaintance with his old companion to whom he promised marriage. The date of this forthcoming event was settled. The parties had been asked three times in church. Indeed, the appointed morning witnessed half a dozen persons proceeding orderly to the church, and they had reached the steps when a few words of disagreement led to not a few high words of anger, and with an oath Ned turned upon his heels, and left his intended bride to mourn her loss of a bridegroom and a husband.

Subsequently he obtained employment as a pot-boy, but whilst thus engaged he found it again necessary to quit the neighbourhood. This time he journeyed to Chatham without any money, destitute and hungry, having been compelled on one occasion even to beg for a piece of bread. Arriving at Chatham, weary and footsore, he went direct to the casual ward, and obtained a night's lodging, with some bread and a pint of “skilly” in the morning, for which he had to work nearly four hours in the stoneyard.

After a few applications at the ship yard he succeeded in joining the *Wellesley* as a sailor. He found the sailors exceedingly kind and generous ; seeing him hungry they gave him some food, and finding him unusually lively they

complimented him upon being "a jolly spark," and themselves upon the happiness of having so cheerful an associate. He says that it was the custom for every man in the ship to be served with half a quartern of raw rum, but that the men, not deeming this a sufficient allowance, agreed that two should have the whole, viz., twenty-four half-quarterns of rum, with the portion of water served therewith. "These two are called the 'captain' and 'mate' of mess, and we all accordingly got a turn of office once in twelve days; of course, as may be supposed, unless in the case of those who sold a portion of their allowance, they were nearly mad drunk after imbibing this quantity of spirits, and their quarrels sometimes led to a court-martial." In a few days he received his sailor's clothes, and then he began to learn how to knot and splice. It was soon found that he could row admirably, and he was therefore appointed stroke-oarsman in what was termed the captain's "gig." "Soon after this," he says, "I received my three months' allowance of 3 lbs. of tobacco, with some serge, flannel, stockings, boots, etc.; and it being my turn ashore, not having any money, I thought I would put on some extra clothing under my usual things, to leave at the pawnbroker's in the town, and thus procure some. Accordingly I did so, and then spent the money in drink; but this money going only a little way whilst I was at the public-house drinking and dancing to the strains of the fiddle, I became very desirous of obtaining more, and soon parted with my flannel." The next morning he was taken back to his ship; but this being his first offence, he was only punished by having his liberty restrained.

Some time after he obtained leave to go on shore with the "liberty men," and was soon after imprisoned in Maidstone Gaol for another offence,—a punishment, as he rightly deemed it, for his scandalous behaviour to his mother.

"In most of the wards," Ned relates, "there were, as a

rule, forty prisoners taking their food together. In the corner of our ward there was a cupboard with two shelves, in which the men were in the habit of putting a portion of their day's allowance of bread, which was always served out in the morning, first sticking in it a piece of wood with a certain number of notches upon its end. Into this box or cupboard some of the prisoners used, after eating very largely of their own bread, to look out for the biggest piece there was, and change the sticks by sleight-of-hand, so that scarcely a day passed without some poor fellow coming short of his allowance. One day, thinking my skilly was very cold, I walked from my seat over to the fire, and putting my pannikin over the coals, endeavoured to get it a little warmer. At this time there were a great number of the German Legion in that prison, undergoing punishment for various offences, and one of these was made warder over us. It being his duty to keep our pannikins clean, when he saw what I was doing he flew into a passion, and threatened if I did not take my pot from off the fire he would report me. To which I, closing my fist, replied, 'If you do I'll break your jaw.' Clearly understanding what I meant, he challenged me to fight it out in the prison courtyard. Accordingly, with a few of the others, we adjourned there for that purpose; but in the second round I struck my opponent on the nose, blackening both of his eyes. This soon put an end to the fight, and we were all very anxious to blind the turnkeys as to what had taken place; and after some persuasion we succeeded in getting the German to tell the turnkey that, whilst he was walking along the front of the bed-cell, he had accidentally run his head against the iron part of the door, and striking his nose had given himself two black eyes. This yarn took admirably, and was the joke of all the prisoners up to the time that I left the place."

Upon Ned's discharge he succeeded in getting a berth as stoker on board the *Alacrity*, which was ordered to

take part in a grand review at Spithead. Having arrived there he spent his first evening on shore. He had but little money, but he obtained more by selling his good clothes for old ones. He was absent when the men assembled as usual, and it was not until the end of three days that he returned in a most pitiable plight. His linen was mostly in ribbons, his blue canvas trousers had one leg off at the knee, and the other torn half-way up the calf, and he was minus shoes, stockings, hat, and comforter. In this state he was put down into the cock-pit, with both legs and hands in irons, where he remained for three days. He would have been flogged, but the captain was good-natured, and was content to punish him by keeping him on board.

Instead of feeling grateful, the prisoner at large was dissatisfied, and wished he had been punished, so that it might all be over, and he be allowed to take his turn in going ashore. The consequence was that he grew grossly careless, until one morning, about a fortnight after his offence, the master-at-arms, looking down the ship's hatchway into the stoker's hole, beckoned the malcontent upstairs, and whispered to him, "Don't be alarmed, old chap. I'm very sorry, but I must tell you the worst of it—they are making arrangements for you to be flaked (or flogged) this morning." At first Ned treated the information somewhat cavalierly, but on observing the pitiful looks with which some of the sailors regarded him, and the sight of the grating at the main rigging, and then the cat-o-nine-tails, with its green-baize handle, his courage began to fail. Still he remembered the advice, "Be firm, Sarvo," and tried to maintain his wonted indifference.

"One of the marines drew near me, and whispering in my ears said, 'Here's a lead button, Sarvo; keep this between your teeth whilst being flogged, and it will save you from biting your tongue!' Ere I had got the button fairly in my mouth a shrill whistle echoed fore and aft

the ship, followed by a loud shout from the boatswain's mate, 'Hands, all hands, to witness punishment.' The momentary bustle brought about by this sound soon gave me to understand that I was on board a man-o'-war. The 'blue-jackets' were galloping up the stairs, the marines were rattling their fire-arms, and everybody going towards the quarter-deck. This all took the bravery out of me ; yet I waited in silence, striving to muster up courage to play the man, when presently two marines with fixed bayonets marched me on to the quarter-deck. Here I found all the officers in full dress uniform, and the blue-jackets arranged in rear of the marines. I had scarcely taken my position against the mainmast when the commander proceeded to read the articles of war, after which, speaking to me, he said, 'Strip, sir.' Having previously been told what to do by the ship's corporal, I proceeded to tie the lanyard of my knife round my waist, and pulling off both my guernsey and flannel shirt—both of which had been lent me—I stood barebacked, ready for the dreadful work. My hands having been stretched out and tied up to the grating, and my ankles fastened together, the boatswain's mate took the cat-o'-nine-tails, and having tucked up his sleeves stood near to me, awaiting his orders. For upwards of a minute there was dead silence ; then the commander called out in a loud voice, 'Boatswain's mate, do your duty.' Instantly the cat-o'-nine-tails was raised in the air, and like boiling lead fell upon my back.

"One dozen lashes having been given, the doctor drew near, and having looked at me nodded his head to the commander, who gave orders to the boatswain's mate to continue his work. During the infliction of the second dozen, in my heart I said, 'Oh that I might die, and get clear of this dreadful punishment !' when all at once the veil seemed to be torn from my eyes, and I saw my once dear and happy home, with my godly father and mother,

the open Bible, and the morning and evening acts of devotion, and seemed to hear the solemn warning of 'After death comes the judgment,' spoken so often by my father."

For about the first time he felt really afraid of death, and trembled as he seemed to be on the verge of a dread eternity. The bystanders little knew the thoughts that flashed one after another, in quick succession, across his distressed mind, and Ned throughout was careful to conceal his feelings, since he was resolved not to appear as a coward. Having received the two dozen lashes, the doctor again examined him, and finding his lips feverish, ordered a quart pot of water to be brought, and after drinking the water the punishment proceeded. The three dozen lashes having been duly administered, he was untied, and kept under the charge of a sentry until sunset, when he was expected to return to his work as usual.

This awful scene in Ned's life has been to him, since he has become a preacher of the gospel, pregnant with illustrations. In describing the agonies of our Lord, and the treatment He received when dying for a lost world, Ned has made an effective contrast, in a most reverent spirit, between the Innocent Sufferer and himself, the guilty transgressor. Ordinarily such a comparison would shock the sensitive ear of an intelligent hearer, but as Ned pictures it to his rough listeners the semblance of blasphemy is avoided. Deprecating, as the writer would, all comparisons between human sufferings and that unique agony of the Unique Man, Christ Jesus, he cannot see the impropriety of the statement that our Lord suffered a punishment He did not deserve, while the preacher was punished for his own transgressions, and yet he was refreshed by a good draught of clean water, which was not proffered the sufferer on Calvary when He cried out, "I thirst." No doubt some of his comparisons would not bear the test of legitimate criticism ; but to Ned's humble

hearers they are very significant of a truth which no criticism can overturn.

Ned had no sooner taken his seat against the hatch-way that led down to the mess than he found that some of his messmates had procured him a quart pot of grog, three parts of which were rum ; they also provided him with clean soft linen to cover his lacerated back. The grog stupefied him, and caused him to sleep until he was released from the sentry's charge. At four o'clock in the morning he was ready to assist in the operation known as "holy-stone decks," or, as the sailors irreverently call it, "reading the Bible." This was done by a number of sailors kneeling several in a row, and rubbing the stones along a quantity of sand previously laid down, to make the decks white and clean.

The lessons Ned had thus learnt one would have thought would remain indelibly impressed upon his memory, and serve as warnings against further transgression. But fear could not teach where love failed to move. He had been entreated and besought by those who had not even yet given him up, but these entreaties had been despised and neglected. Punishment had been inflicted sufficient to deter any ordinary sinner ; but when the pains were forgotten the lessons which had accompanied them disappeared also. "A rod for a fool's back" ; but the rod still leaves the man a fool. Let sceptics say what they will, here was a sinner whom nothing but a miracle could ever change.

The first opportunity that presented itself was seized to transgress again. His past misdeeds having been atoned for by the punishment he had endured, he was placed among the liberty men, and privileged to spend one night on shore. By playing skilfully with dominoes and cards he had succeeded in obtaining some pocket-money, to pay for a bed and two or three pots of liquor. But, instead of returning next morning accord-

ing to the regulations, he did not reach the ship until late at night. For this he was severely reprimanded, and ordered to be kept on the black list for three weeks. This consisted in the first place of turning out half an hour before the usual time in the morning to sand the decks, ready for the men to rub them with the stones ; in the usual time for meals being curtailed by one half ; in doing all the servile work of the ship, such as tarring the rigging, scraping and blacking cannon balls, and other humiliating services. Added to this, the black-list men were served with what was greatly dreaded, namely, "six-water grog," instead of three-water grog ; a change so much for the worse that the grog, in consequence of the over-abundance of water, tasted like nauseous medicine.

About this time Her Majesty was expected to proceed by water to Queenstown. Accordingly five or six despatch boats, together with the *Forth* frigate, were ordered to sea for a ten days' channel cruise. "Unfortunately for us," says Ned, "we had not got more than four days' provisions on board ; but, depending upon our neighbours, the anchor was weighed, the sails unfurled, the steam got up, and we proceeded outside Plymouth breakwater. After keeping company with the frigate a few days we fell in with heavy and stormy weather, so stormy, indeed, that all thoughts of taking care of our neighbours vanished, and the motto of each man became, 'Each one for himself, and God for us all.' After a very stormy night they found themselves safely housed in Plymouth Sound, and were ordered back again for not bringing the frigate in company. This they proceeded to do, uttering fearful oaths, and muttering blasphemous curses all the way. Afterwards they proceeded to Portsmouth, where the *Alacrity* was paid off, and a week's holiday given, when they were expected to join the *Agamemnon*, then a training ship at Portsmouth.

A week's liberty was of no moral benefit to the de-

praved sailor. However he went with some of his companions to London, where he lodged with his mother. Here he formed an acquaintance with a respectable young woman, who subsequently became his wife, the same person whom, when a young girl, he ill-treated. When the day arrived for his departure for Portsmouth his mother managed to raise sufficient money to pay his fare down.

Soon after his arrival at Portsmouth he was about to be discharged with others, when a counter order arrived. He says :—

“At length, a quarter to one o'clock on the third day arrived, and my name was called out, upon which I proceeded to the gun-room to obtain my money and my discharge ; but while there a dispute arose between me and the purser, who was not willing to pay me all that I thought myself entitled to, on the ground that nearly all my money had been spent in tobacco, clothes, soap, etc. The question being asked me where I was going, I replied, ‘To London.’ ‘Then,’ said the captain, ‘here’s your discharge and a letter ; and if you go to the Admiralty, they will no doubt look over the books there ; and as they have more time than we have now, perhaps they may be able to settle with you better than we can.’ With this I proceeded below for my bag of clothes, such as they were, and was just coming on deck, after parting with some of my old companions, when I heard a shrill whistle, and a voice calling out, ‘Hands, all hands to muster !’ but a young fellow coming on to the main deck said, quite loud enough for me to hear, ‘Ah, it’s all up ; they have got a counter order from the Admiralty, to say that no more discharges are to be given to the men, for fear they should lose all the navy.’ Going near to him, I said, ‘Is that true, George?’ ‘Yes,’ said he, ‘it’s too true, for I have just heard the order given to let no one pass over the gangway, and also for all the boats to be ordered away from the ship’s side.’

“Of course I knew that while the ship was in commission, with her pennon flying at the masthead, and I on board, my discharge was perfectly useless ; so I immediately proceeded to one of the ship’s port-holes, and found that all the boats had left its side, with the exception of a very small foreign one, capable of holding two or three persons.” Seeing no other way of escape, he threw his bundle of clothes into the boat, and as quickly jumped into it, and soon applied the sculls to the water, and so got free.

It was a hazardous attempt, and for it he might have been subjected to severe discipline. But he was thoroughly tired of the restraints of a sailor’s life, and was determined to be freed of naval discipline. When all his money was spent he was obliged to part with some of his clothing to pay his fare to London. On arriving home he was treated by both parents and relatives with great kindness, and ultimately his father obtained work for him at a barge-building firm, where he received eighteen shillings a week. He firmly resolved to keep to his work honourably, and to eschew all idle habits and evil companions. For a time he kept true to his resolutions, but gradually he fell into his old customs. Instead of bringing home his wages he would frequent the public-house, drinking and playing at cards for money, and spending his evenings at the Victoria Theatre.

CHAPTER V.

Ned's Marriage.—Scene at the church steps.—Cruel treatment of his wife.—Ned an habitual drunkard.—Summoned for ill-treating his wife.—An artful contrivance.—A narrow escape for a minister.—Ned joins the Thames police.

HOPES were entertained of Ned's reclamation by marriage. It was therefore with no regret that his mother heard of his attachment to Maria Beard. Indeed she was resolved for his sake to facilitate matters as far as possible, and his mother and future mother-in-law combined to furnish a two-roomed cottage for their use. The alliance, of course, became the object of conversation among the gossips of the neighbourhood, who solemnly assured themselves, then each other, and afterwards Ned's parents, that it was time the reign of courtship ended and the era of marriage commenced. Everything was therefore settled ; but just before the time appointed Ned left his work as a barge builder, and again worked as a lighter-man on the Thames. Here he had more frequent opportunities of obtaining drink and getting tipsy, and night after night was thus spent, including the evening before the marriage-day. The consequence was that the bridegroom did not put in an appearance until the morning, when he had not thoroughly recovered from the night's debauch.

But to church they went. One of the articles of agreement had been that none of the neighbours should be made acquainted with either the day, or hour, or place. Such a measure for self-protection was deemed to be absolutely necessary ; for, with the poor, a wedding is a day

not only for close staring, free criticisms, and obtrusive freedoms, but also for jollifications more or less ill-timed. But Ned had broken the covenant while under the influence of drink ; and judge of the inexpressible disgust of the bride when, on quitting church, she saw before her a row of nodding, approving, and curious neighbours. Not having sufficient courage to faint, she complained to her husband, and charged him with violating his promise, and wilfully annoying her. Ned answered her sharply, and when the party had left the churchyard gate, he vowed he would have no more to say to her, and leaving her, walked towards home.

An inauspicious beginning, certainly, of what proved for a time an inauspicious union. However, an arrangement was effected during the afternoon, which satisfied the little that was left of the husband's honour, and brought peace of mind to the distracted bride.

Ned was now resolved to work hard, and to make money. A policeman called him up early in the morning, and he continued his labours until late at night. He soon began, however, to ill-use his wife, and one morning he so far forgot every manly feeling as to turn her out of doors, *en chemise*, where she remained, sitting in the doorway, under the drenching rain, for a little time, until a neighbour hospitably invited her inside her house. To this day Ned shudders as he calls to mind his cruel conduct towards the woman whose amiability and patience should have won his esteem and tender care. But a drunkard is an insensate brute, wreaking his vengeance upon the weak, and cruelly punishing the innocent. Such a life as his wife was now living could only lead to one issue ; human patience and powers of endurance are not unlimited, and although she had patiently borne much suffering caused by her husband's wanton cruelty, she determined to quit her home, taking her child and some of the furniture with her.

"Sitting one morning, miserable," says Ned, "not knowing where my wife and child were, the drink previously received into my system now becoming dead, and having no means to revive it by feeding the thirst it created with a fresh supply, I determined upon calling in a broker and selling the few things that remained. But just as I was about to do so I heard a loud gruff voice calling out 'Edward Wright,' and descending the stairs a little way I saw that my visitor was none other than a policeman from a neighbouring police-court, who handed me a summons. Not being a good scholar, I asked him if he would read it for me, which he did, saying at the conclusion, 'You'll get a sixer for this job, Ned!' Laughingly I turned my back upon him, and proceeded upstairs, swearing vengeance against the police, my wife and family, and cursing mankind everywhere.

"The morning arrived on which I was expected to appear in answer to the summons; but having previously been compelled to attend at the court, not only for felony, but also on three following Saturdays for being drunk and disorderly, I made up my mind not to go into the court, and accordingly I conceived a plan to render such an appearance unnecessary.

"On arriving at the waiting-room of the police-court I soon discerned some of my wife's relatives, who held the baby, and surrounded my wife for fear of my violence. I knew that the man who kept the door of the police-court was friendly towards me, so making him acquainted with my purpose, he fell in with it; and the doors being opened, the persons to whom summonses had been issued went inside, but I took care to remain without.

"My wife's mother went in first, my wife followed, and then my wife's sister, who carried the baby; and this being what I desired, I made a sign, and, as was agreed upon, the policeman said to the young girl, 'Have you got a summons here?' Of course she replied, 'No, sir.'

'Then,' said he, 'you must take that baby outside, for we cannot have him screaming here;' to which my mother-in-law, of whom I was most afraid, said, 'It's all right, Betsy, you can keep the baby outside.' Expecting my case would be about the third on the list, I lost but very little time, and went to the policeman, saying, 'Mrs. Wright wanted outside, here's her baby crying.' To this the policeman, winking at me, called out, 'Mrs. Wright,' and on her drawing near to him he whispered, 'Your baby is crying outside, you had better go to it.' Of course her mother wanted to go too; but the policeman, knowing his work, said, as he pushed my wife outside and shut the door, 'This isn't a beershop that you can go in and out of just as you like.' I knew that if I could only get my wife alone I could gain power over her, and this I did by asking her whether she was willing to come home and forget all the past. For a moment she seemed to hesitate, and knowing that the time was passing quickly and that our case would soon be called on, I said, 'Well, if you won't come, the baby shall.' Accordingly I ran into the next room, and snatching the child from my wife's sister's arms I rushed out of the place and into the public-house which was next door; so my wife, seeing me determined, said, 'Well, if you will promise not to beat me again I'll come home.' Back we went, to the disgust of my wife's relatives, who declared they would never help her again."

About a quarter to three o'clock one Sunday afternoon Ned, with a few boon companions, was standing at the bar of a public-house at Bankside, drinking beer and spirits as quickly as possible before the house closed, when he observed a tall young minister, with a band of ten followers, take his stand upon a vacant piece of ground in front of the public-house, and close to the railings which protect persons from falling into the Thames. In many of the low parts of London it is

considered by the "roughs" to be excellent sport to worry, if not ill-treat, an open-air preacher, and such an one must expect to encounter much opposition if he would seek to labour among the rude and vulgar. Ned was soon tempted by his companions to upset the open air preacher, and he resolved to throw him over the rails that he might enjoy the privilege of a soft bed in the water. As he was on the point of carrying out his purpose, the preacher, guessing the nature of the plot formed against him, gave utterance solemnly to some of the most powerful warnings of Scripture, in the hope that they might arrest his assailant. Ned was compelled, involuntarily, to listen, and paid deep attention to all that followed ; and could not find it in his heart to molest any further the man who had thus mastered him.

Not long ago Ned was preaching the gospel at Southampton, and a number of the ministers of the town were seated on the platform, when he observed one whose features he recognized as an old acquaintance. He whispered in his ear, "Did you ever preach at Bank-side?" "Oh, yes," was the reply, "I was at one time the minister of — Chapel, and often used to preach in the place you mention ; by the way, I once had a very narrow escape of being thrown into the river in that very place." The result was a mutual recognition ; and the reader may judge of the powerful impression made that evening by the recital of this story to the audience when it came to be the minister's turn to speak.

As an illustration of the daring disposition of Ned, the following story may be here given : He was determined to accept a wager laid by some of his companions that he could get into the Thames police. He therefore went one day to Scotland Yard, and was one of about thirty men, most of whom had apparently come from the country, who that morning made application for the Metropolitan police. He was examined by the doctor, who did not seem to

notice the scars on his back, received when in the navy, and was thus far approved of, and ordered to attend the next day at the Thames Police Station, situated at the lower side of the London Docks. Here he feared failure in putting forth his claims ; but two things were in his favour—he had succeeded in obtaining a written character from an old employer, very carefully worded, as most testimonials are, omitting all that was essential, and dealing in such commonplaces as are deemed sufficient passports to respectable positions. The result was that the application proved to be successful, and Ned resolved, having gone so far, to join the force, knowing that eighteen shillings or a guinea a week was not all the money a shrewd and dishonest Thames policeman could secure.

CHAPTER VI.

Engaged in rowing matches.—Doggett's "Coat and Badge."—
Heroic rescue of a drowning boy.—Loss of the race.

OF rowing matches Ned was specially fond, and he engaged in several with great zest. At Bankside there lived a freeman of the river Thames, who made it his pleasure to collect money from the public-houses of the district to purchase the freedom of the water every year for one apprentice. The freedom was arranged to be contended for by six apprentices, who were elected to row in wager boats from London Bridge to Westminster and back. Ned succeeded in getting his name put down as a candidate that year for the prize, and so ably did he row that, amid the plaudits of the excited throng on the shores, he was hailed the winner of his freedom of the Thames. This race having made him somewhat known in the aquatic world, he was soon backed by some persons to row "Young Woody," an expert hand. Money was collected to send him into the country for training, and he was forbidden the use of all spirituous liquors. About this time he became a teetotaller, and by those who were total abstainers he was lionized, and the race announced as "water against beer." During the time of his training, however, he sought the aid of a glass of old ale and a biscuit; and either the biscuit was very dry, or the old ale very inspiring, for he demanded more, and succeeded in getting enough to make him intoxicated. On the morning of the race they started, in the midst of pouring rain, in outrigger boats, from Putney to Mortlake, the

stakes being £10 : £5 a side. In the course of half a mile, such was the speed with which Ned's boat went, his opponent was left quite a hundred yards behind. Pleasing pictures of a convivial festival that would be held that night with the £10 that would certainly be his filled his mind with unusual delight, and spurred him still onwards, when suddenly the scull on the off-side broke right across the blade, and the hapless rower sat madly watching "Young Woody" row by, winning with ease. Soon after this engagement he became a member of the South London Rowing club, and an acknowledged stroke-oarsman, and served in that capacity in the winning boat of the club's annual race, said to have been the best race ever rowed over that course. He also rowed for the Leander Coat and Badge, said to have been a splendid race, in which Wright came in second ; and competed for similar honours and possessions at Putney, but without success.

A few months before the change that turned the whole current of Ned's life into another channel he was a candidate for a prize for a coat and badge, which was the object of many a young waterman's ambition. All young men who had finished their apprenticeship, and obtained a license to work as watermen on the Thames, were entitled to draw lots for the privilege ; only six men could row, but this year upwards of ninety were privileged to take part in this preliminary test. Ten days before the race these ninety men and their friends assembled at Fishmongers' Hall to cast lots for the competitors for Doggett's Coat and Badge. Ned was there to watch his chance, and the first five names drawn out were prizes, amongst whom was a favourite rower named Short, of Bermondsey, who had the confidence of the betting fraternity, the other four being regarded as of meaner ability as prize rowers. One name remained yet to be called to make up the required number, and there were eighty-five names left in the ballot-box. Seventy of these proved to

be blanks, and the excitement increased and became quite feverish as name after name was announced as "blank." Only one name remained, and the Bankside party were aroused to the highest pitch of enthusiasm when it was known that Edward Wright was their champion.

Ned was at this period in deep poverty, and it was agreed that he should prepare for the race at home, his friends making arrangements for a due supply of bitter beer and beefsteaks and mutton chops, which are considered to be essential for a man in training. The confidence of those who belong to the betting world in Ned's condition and skill seemed to be almost unlimited, and competent critics were so satisfied with him that he was regarded almost universally as the best man. Carefully were his movements watched by those who were interested in the race, and large sums of money were laid on his winning. He had been sober and careful in his diet, since the rowing would be all against the tide from the beginning to the end, and he would therefore require great physical endurance.

Two days before the contest an event occurred which brought Ned into still greater notoriety. He had performed his usual morning exercise on the river, and had just brought his boat to the shore at Lambeth pier, where a number of his admirers had assembled to witness one of his trial trips, and many persons had put forth their hands to pull him out of the boat, when, as he was dressing, the cry, "A boy overboard," greeted his ears. The whole assembly hastened to the steam-boat pier, which was crowded, and Ned accompanied the crowd. It seems that two steamers had just arrived at the pier, one an up and the other a down boat; and every eye was fixed upon the spot in the river where the boy had gone down; but there were no signs of him, and scarcely a ripple was observed on the surface of the water.

Looking carefully upon the water, Ned observed bubbles close beside the inside steamer, and in a moment

the thought occurred to him that those bubbles were probable caused by the last breathings of the drowning lad. Instantly, with the quickness of an apparition, he plunged into the river, dived beneath the surface, and while the crowd on the shore and pier were awaiting in breathless suspense his reappearance, he dived to the bottom, and there lay the body, as if dead. Passing one arm under the lad, and with the other raising himself and his burden to the surface, Ned was seen with his prize above the water, and was greeted with a simultaneous shout from the spectators, such as a British crowd of admirers know how to give. A boat was meanwhile sent to his assistance, the boy put in it, and conveyed to a public-house, and Ned, amid such plaudits as nearly bewildered him, swam safely to the pier.

As he was going away the captain of one of the steam-boats cried out, "Hold on! we are going to make a collection for you." "All right," was Ned's response; "while you are doing so I'll just run up and see how the lad is getting on." The boy had been so long under water that he appeared as one dead, and although stimulants were freely given, and every appliance obtained for restoring animation, it was feared for some time that the case was hopeless. The means were at last successful, and the frantic mother, whose wild shrieks of sorrow had been heard from outside, pushed her way into the room, clasped her child fondly to her bosom, and having relieved herself by a flood of tears, inquired, "Where is the man who saved my child?" The brave rescuer was pointed out, and falling at his feet she thanked him repeatedly, asking what she could do to reward him for his bravery. Ned laid his hand on her head, and said, "All right, mother; I've a little one of my own."

Returning to the pier, he found that the collection had been made by the captains of the two steamers and the man in charge of the pier, and his jacket pockets were

filled with coppers, and his trousers pockets with small silver. Of course he could not resist the temptation to drink too much rum, and the consequence was that he spent all he had that night in the public-house, going home drunk and penniless ! He could expose his life to danger, to rescue a drowning child ; but he could not be brave enough to resist the temptations of drink. He could sympathize with a mother's sorrow and a child's suffering ; but in the midst of these allurements to drink he could forget his young and hungry wife, and neglect the wants of his infant child. It was in vain that he knew that he endangered his success on the coming race day by over-drink ; neither ambition nor health held him back. With his wet clothes still on he remained at the bar of the public-house, drinking until he was almost incapable of journeying home.

Inured to this horrid kind of life he did not suffer as others less accustomed to dissipation might have done ; and on the morning of the contest he presented himself at London Bridge, the starting-point, in fair condition, determined to win. This race for Doggett's Coat and Badge, contrary to all others except that for the championship, is rowed for in "the bare buff," no special dress or colour distinguishes the men, and each of the competitors has a representative or seconder, who arranges all the preliminaries, including that of drawing lots for the starting stations of their respective men. The last lot drawn takes the first or best station, the Surrey side of London Bridge, and the last lot but one takes the next station, and so on. Ned's seconder was fortunate in securing him the best place, and as it happened that Short was his next neighbour, the two favourites were side by side. Each race boat was attended by an eight-oared galley, to pilot them over their course, and several steamers were crowded with spectators to witness the result.

Ned was confident of victory. He had set his heart

on the prize. He had in his way asked God to give him the coat and badge, although in other things he had not recognized His existence. He imagined himself already dressed in the livery, fancied how he would look with it on him, and pictured the proud position he would then occupy. The thought of failure seemed so distasteful that it was regarded as impossible.

After three false starts the company got away ; but before Ned had rowed three boats' length his neighbour Short and he fouled each other ; Ned, being slightly in advance, managed to get the blade of his scull against Short's back, and held him fast. The other four men were rowing ahead, while Short and Ned were wrangling and swearing at each other. At length Ned begged Short to let his boat go out into the stream, so that they might clear one another, as they had to row against the tide. His opponent did so, but Ned at once, with the assistance of his attending galley, so manœuvred as to get clean away from Short. By this time, of course, the other four were considerably ahead, and by dint of the utmost exertion and the most skilful rowing he took the third place at Blackfriars Bridge, and after a severe struggle he shot ahead of the second boat. The excitement on the side of the river, and among the Irish coal porters of Bankside, to whom Ned was well known, and also among the passengers on board the steamers, was indescribable. Wagers of £12 to £1 were freely made in favour of Ned's winning, and he was encouraged by the cheers he heard on all sides. As he neared the first man an untoward event occurred, which decided the race as far as Ned was concerned. Shooting out round the point on the south shore between Waterloo and Hungerford bridges, the tide caught the bow of Ned's boat, and carried her out in spite of all his skill ; and although he used his left hand with double power, whilst his right hand scull was in abeyance, yet he failed ; his boat came

athwart a buoy, and his scull became locked between it and a barge, and before he could get himself freed he had the mortification of seeing his five opponents pass him. Short was fast beating the rest, and eventually the race resulted in his winning the coveted coat and badge. Ned subsequently rowed leisurely after the others, over the whole distance, that he might obtain the sovereign given to every one who rowed ; and was sufficiently near to hear the band strike up, "See the conquering hero comes," as Short came in first. He had no sooner reached the shore than, in a fit of jealous anger, he offered to fight any one of his competitors, when some man answered by saying, "You might be beaten at that as well as at rowing," and for this he was felled by Ned to the ground. Fortunately Mrs. Wright was present, and a publican having advanced the sovereign, she persuaded him to take a cab, and drive over to Bankside. In the evening, according to announcement, a "grand extra performance" was given in Victoria Theatre, at which the six competitors for Doggett's Coat and Badge appeared on the stage. The theatre was crowded ; and when the curtain rose the six men stood before the audience and received a perfect ovation, and although Ned Wright had not been successful in the race, he received no small share of the applause.

This was Ned's first appearance on the boards of Victoria Theatre. It was in the character of a defeated, chagrined man—his first and happily last appearance in that character. Very different indeed was the occasion which brought him the second time, some eighteen months after, to stand in the same position. Again were the walls placarded with his name, but it was as a successful man, having won a greater prize—the salvation of his soul. Not this time as a mere object of curiosity, to take part in a dumb-show ; but as a preacher of the Gospel, an illustrious instance of the power of Divine

grace in rescuing from sin one of the most zealous adherents of the cause of impiety and rebellion.

For a long time Ned rebelled against his fate in failing to win the coat and badge, and could not understand why he should have been so unfortunate. On two other occasions he had rowed for coats and prizes, and this was the last opportunity he could have of gaining Doggett's much-coveted honour, and he had put forth all his skill, and had even used trickeries, but without success ! His pride was deeply wounded, and he felt his position keenly. It was twelve months after this event that he saw his opponent strutting proudly down Tooley Street, wearing the full dress of a waterman—scarlet breeches, silk stockings, red cap, coat, and silver badge. The sight awoke painful recollections of his defeat and disgrace, and Ned felt humiliated for the moment. But he was not annoyed. A great change had come over his life in the meantime, and the ambition that once aroused his whole nature had ceased to stir him into action. He was better prepared for the taunt, "Well, Ned, you did not get the coat and badge after all," as his adversary pointed with vanity to his silver plate. "No," said Ned, "I certainly did not ; you got it. But I've a garment for all that, and it is in the shape of a robe ;" and before the crowd he stood and told in simple words, and in an unaffected manner, the wondrous story of the revelation of Divine love to his poor heart, and concluded by setting before his hearers the higher ambition of winning Christ, and being found in Him.

On the 9th of November following Ned again encountered the wearer of the uniform and badge, carrying the banner of the Waterman's Company in the Lord Mayor's show, going first, according to privilege. Ned that day carried a banner too, the banner, as he called it, of a King, and on it was written, "Be sure your sins will find you out ;" and beneath was the inscription of the covenant of mercy, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth

us from all sin." No man was happier, not even the Lord Mayor himself, than Ned that day, as with the flag in one hand he distributed tracts with the other ; and, as he looked at his old friend so gaily decked in the procession, he shouted, " Look at this,—these are the colours to fight under ; none but Jesus can do helpless sinners good."

CHAPTER VII.

A challenge to fight.—Preaching in Astley's Theatre.—NED AND HIS WIFE CONVERTED.—The happy home.—The sequel to the projected prize fight.—Ned tells the story of his conversion.—No employment.

THE challenge which Ned had given to fight Jack Connelly was now regarded as a stepping-stone to some high position in the sporting world. An arrangement was therefore made, which was duly recorded in the sporting papers, and Ned put himself in training for the encounter. At length Easter-day—the most memorable day in his life—arrived. After tea he informed his wife of the projected prize-fight, and invited her to accompany him to Pimlico, so that if any of his companions should call that night, with a view of persuading him to drink, he might escape a temptation that would materially interfere with his prospects of success in the approaching prize-fight. The two children were thereupon put into a bed composed of cane cuttings, and covered with a thin patchwork quilt, and the parents commenced their walk. A more meanly clad couple could not have been seen. Ned was dressed in a threadbare pea-jacket and waistcoat, and his limbs were encased in a shabby well-patched (or ill-patched) pair of trousers that ought to have been long ago consigned to the dust-heap. His wife was but thinly attired—indeed barely clad. Husband and wife had not proceeded far towards Westminster Bridge when they were accosted by a young boy who, handing him a small bill, informed them that a working man was announced to speak at Astley's Theatre that evening, the particulars of which he could

read for himself. "But," said Ned, "though I can read a little I can't manage such small type as that." The lad was not willing to be put off, and so he read aloud the bill; and when he got to the words, "All seats free, no collections," Ned, nudging his wife, whispered, "That will do for us, mate; the seats are free, and there's nothing to pay."

If it were a subject for his neighbours' astonishment to see Ned and his wife out together—of which they did not fail to inform him—it must have been still stranger to witness them walking into a building where a religious service was about to be held. Ned was one of the rather numerous class of the poor who never see the inside of a place of worship excepting at their wedding, and perhaps at the christening of their children. Had it been a church or chapel he would not have accepted the boy's invitation; but curiosity, and the fact that Astley's Theatre had been a favoured place of resort on the week-day, induced him to spend an hour there. On an ordinary day, when a performance was going on, he would not have hesitated about occupying the most prominent seat in the building; but, through fear of being observed at a preaching service, he took his place behind a pillar under the boxes. Stooping down towards his wife he whispered, "Do you ever remember coming here before, mate?" Alas, she remembered it quite well—remembered his protestations of love, and his professions of hatred of the man who would strike a woman. And yet, as a commentary, there were two blackened eyes and a sorrowing heart! He was a little pained by his wife's reply, and it made him wretched as he thought of the past seven years of cruelty and crime. The singing of one of the lively so-called revivalistic hymns, common at most theatre services, soon dispelled all melancholy, and by the time the working-man preacher commenced his address Ned had forgotten his remorse.

The address was an impassioned appeal, full of references to the sublimities of heaven, the terrors of hell, the nearness of death, and the certainty of a judgment-day. To Ned it was but an idle tale. He thought more of the glaring attractions of the theatre, and the uses to which it was ordinarily put; and, rather wearied by the sermon, he resolved to leave the building, when his attention was suddenly arrested by the preacher falling upon his knees, and praying so earnestly that Ned was constrained to listen.

"Whilst praying," he says, "for all runaway children, I could not help believing that he meant me; and here came an urgent appeal that God would save the young men who were sending their fathers' and mothers' grey hairs with sorrow to the grave; after this prayer he cried with a loud voice, 'Young man, where will you spend eternity?' This he repeated six times, causing an interval of solemn quiet to pervade the meeting between each cry of eternity.'

"During these awful moments all my past history rose up before my mind, even from my very boyhood. Then came the thought as to whether I was prepared to die, and I remembered what the preacher had been saying, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God.' This all tended to harrow my feelings, until at last I swooned."

It was while in this partly unconscious state that a vision seemed to bring to him all the lessons of truth he had heard during his life. Ned has often described his feelings in so thrilling a way as to create a deep impression upon his listeners. "I felt carried away," he says, "and found myself arraigned before the most awful tribunal I ever witnessed. There sat the Judge of high heaven, upon His throne of glory, surrounded by angels and archangels and the ransomed saints. The brightness of these beings dazzled my eyes, and made me feel as if I would give ten thousand worlds to crumble into dust. But no! I was there! The books were opened, and, without a word

being spoken, I felt myself to be the only unhappy being there. Sins that had been committed and forgotten seemed to appear before my eyes, caused me to hang down my head with shame, and in my heart to exclaim, 'Oh that I had never been born !' Then the devil dared to intrude, and suggested the words to me by way of temptation, 'Be a man, Ned ; curse God, and die.' At this moment a voice echoed through the vaults of heaven saying, 'Prisoner at the bar, you are charged with an enormous number of great offences ; do you plead guilty' Shivering like an aspen leaf, not daring to raise my head, I felt this to be ten thousand times worse than being tried at the Old Bailey—that was nothing compared with this ; indeed, when the jury returned a verdict of ' guilty,' I have stood unmoved, and apparently the most unconcerned of all in the court ; but here I felt the case to be entirely altered. There was no deceiving the Judge of all the earth, no bringing false witnesses to swear one clear : His eyes were as flames of fire, searching me through. I would fain have sunk into dust, or even into hell, rather than stand before that great assembly. My hands refused their office ; I could not upraise them to cover my eyes. Oh, what a dreadful feeling was that ! I knew I was guilty ; I felt condemned ; and I stood a wretched sinner before the Judge. Then, too, in all that vast assembly, there was no voice raised in my favour—my case was hopeless. I stood in breathless suspense awaiting my sentence ; and while trembling and quaking with fear, the scalding tears running down my cheeks, and my heart bursting within me, I heard a voice softly and gently whispering in my ear, 'Look to Jesus ; there is pardon and life through looking to Jesus.' Then I cried in agony of soul, 'Where, oh, where is Jesus ?' "

All this seemed to be the work of a few moments. The sin-stricken man, whose soul was feeling its own guilt, and earnestly desiring pardon, was amazed, and yet more

heart-broken, as he saw by faith a vision of Christ crucified. He looked and believed. The Judge rose, and pronounced his acquittal. "Prisoner," He seemed to say, "you have been accused of many, very many, heinous crimes, and have pleaded guilty to them all; not a witness could say a word in your favour; you have not one redeeming point in your character. You have incurred the extreme penalty of the law, which you have so repeatedly broken; you are absolutely without excuse; but this is now the award of love,—solely because of the merits of my dear Son to whom you have looked; I ordain that you be taken from the kingdom of Satan, and be translated into the kingdom of my Son, and that you be made an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ Jesus."

It was at this moment that "poor Ned," as he pathetically designates himself in relating this remarkable story, came back to consciousness. He was then standing against a column, the perspiration streaming from his brow, and tears were channelling his cheeks. So full of amazement was he that he knew not what to do. The thought came to him that if his old companions saw him in tears they would ridicule him, and to escape observation he hastened to the door with the intention of leaving the theatre. But so strong a hold had the scene upon his mind that he returned to his wife. The service was then over; the preacher had left the stage, and was speaking to those who had accepted his call to remain for religious conversation.

"Coming to my wife, he said, 'Well, my friend, and how do matters stand between your soul and God?' Trembling, she answered, 'I am very unhappy, sir.' Of course I thought she was alluding to my past unkindness. I could not suppose it to be possible for her to be unhappy in her soul because of sin, for I believed she had none. Here again I attempted to leave the place, feeling quite overpowered by what I had heard; but no! God

would not allow me to pass that door, and so I was forced back, almost unconsciously, to the same spot I had started from ; and just as I did so the preacher, rising up from his seat beside my wife, clasped together his hands, exclaiming with joy, 'Thank God, the woman's saved.' With the bright picture before my eyes of the Judge in heaven, and the precious words of pardon that had fallen from His lips, I felt almost ready to say, 'And I'm saved too,' but was deterred by the fear that after all I might be lost. Here my wife arose from her seat, and turning to me said, with tears in her eyes, 'Oh, Ned, do trust in Jesus.' All I seemed able to say was, 'Come on,' and turning sharply on my heel I tried to leave the building again. But I was abruptly accosted by a young man who, putting his hand upon my shoulder, said, 'Young man, I have a message for you from the eternal world,' and as he so said he opened his Bible, and drew my attention to the 16th verse of the 3rd chapter of St. John's Gospel. When he had read the words, 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life," he turned to me and said, 'Can you read, sir?' 'A little,' I replied ; when, holding the Bible close up to my face, he rejoined, 'Can you see your name there, my friend?' 'No,' said I, 'I haven't heard it, nor can I see it.' 'Now, you know,' said the young man, 'if you were walking along the country road, and if you saw a board up in the corner of a field, and upon it written, 'Whosoever trespasseth upon these premises will be prosecuted,' you know very well that *whosoever* would mean you as well as any one else ; and so in this verse God says, 'Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish.' 'Well,' said I, 'I believe in Jesus—that is, that He died for me.' 'Then,' said he, 'if that's true, God says you shall never perish ; let God be true, and every man a liar.'"

Ned, with his wife, then left the theatre, and wended

his way home, full of thought as to what had passed, and wondering greatly at the surprising change that had come over his entire nature. He was staggered, and could not realize what it all meant. He had entered upon a new and to him perfectly strange experience, and whither it tended, and what it involved, was beyond his ken. His wife's mind was filled with similar thoughts, and she could find no heart to speak a word. Upon their arrival at home she led the way into the cottage, and, lighting a candle, proceeded to the bedroom.

"From the time we left the theatre," says Ned, "we had not spoken a word to each other. Watching my wife's actions narrowly, I became full of wonder as to what should be the next step, when, to my surprise, she fell down beside the bedstead, and began to pour out her soul before God in thankfulness for His wondrous love made known to her in Jesus Christ that night. Looking at her as I stood beside the doorpost, I felt something of a desire to pray also. It having been a long time since I had heard prayers of any kind, save those heard that evening in the theatre, I felt at a loss as to what I should say. By this time my poor wife's utterance was choked by the sobs that seemed to proceed from her very heart. Although Satan fought very hard with me to prevent me bending my knees, still Jesus gained the victory, and I fell down beside my poor broken-hearted wife, purposing to say that simple prayer, 'Our Father which art in heaven;' but as I was about to do so I seemed to forget the words, and became wholly occupied with the sublime scene I had witnessed whilst in Astley's Theatre. One particular part of this scene interested me more especially—which was Jesus appearing on my behalf as a good and gracious intercessor; and here I became so absorbed with the love I felt towards Him that I could only exclaim, 'Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, I thank Thee from my heart for saving my soul.'"

Ned's simple evangelical faith was very clear. As he often remarks in public, he had cause to be thankful that he was able to believe his sins to be already forgiven, and his salvation to have been already accomplished, instead of hesitating and doubting, and looking at certainties as if they were probabilities. Ned's confidence was solely the result of taking God at His word. He believed that Christ had died that he might not perish ; and so, instead of asking God to reveal this to him, and so to save his soul, he praised Him that the work had been done.

His wife heartily joined with him in prayer and thanksgiving, in which they continued for some time. When they arose Ned observed at the other end of the bedroom, on the couch of cane cuttings, his little boy and girl sitting as if full of wonder and fear, not knowing what to make of the scene. Ned had hitherto felt but little, if any, love for his offspring, but at this moment he understood the refined, inexpressible joy of fatherhood. This was to him a new revelation, which filled his eyes with tears, and his heart with an emotion better understood than described. He had treated them with a severity which was painful to contemplate. How he could have been so unnatural seemed now to him strange. How he could have permitted them almost to starve while he was drinking and rioting passed all comprehension, now he had had his heart filled with the generous impulses of affection. But he knew that it had been so ; and there were the poor little creatures, huddled up in the corner, the victims of his ill-humours and unkindness ! His first feeling was to weep, his next to take them up in his arms and kiss them. There and then he made a solemn vow that, with the help of Him who had awakened such gentle emotions of love in his breast, he would ill-use them no more, but act the part of a Christian parent.

Ned and his wife then adjourned to the other room, for his cottage only contained two apartments, for " a bit

of supper." It was but a small portion, but never meal seemed better. "We were about to partake of it," he says in his simple way, "but both of our hands seemed to refuse to touch it. I remember that my feelings at this moment were that I must ask God's blessing upon the food now, and although I had not said grace for years—indeed, from the time of my boyhood—still I thought I would put my hands together, and open my mouth, and ask God, in words that I had often heard from my godly father, to bless the food He had given us."

When he had done so Mrs. Wright felt too broken-down to partake of anything. "O God," she cried, with a heart full of joy, "this is too much for me." It was an occasion for weeping; and so instead of eating they wept and talked of all that the Lord had that night done for them. What a change! What a salvation!

The door was opened, and in came a Christian man who had lodged in Ned's house before his conversion. "Whatever has led you here?" inquired Ned, surprised at the abrupt appearance of the visitor. "Oh," said he, "Ned, my boy, as soon as I got home to-night I heard of what had taken place with you; and although I was a bit sceptical about its reality, I thought I would come and see."

It was just such a visitor as they needed at this juncture in their life. He was able to give wise counsel; and although a man in humble circumstances, and of no intellectual acquirements, he was competent to show the new converts "the way of God more perfectly." With the Word of God before him, he directed their attention to its precepts, urged upon them an open, frank avowal of their faith in Christ, that the brethren might rejoice, and sinners be convinced of the power of the gospel. With this he urged the necessity of communicating to Ned's old associates the good tidings of what God had done for him, at every favourable opportunity, believing

that when they knew what a change had been wrought in his character they would be impressed with the importance of religion. It was wise counsel. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." If every Christian really believed, and consequently acted upon, this precept of inspiration, the world would, in a Christian and moral sense, be very different from what it is now.

The next morning brought with it some peculiar difficulties which Ned had never before confronted, and in meeting which his piety must, he knew, be put to the test. He had challenged Jack Connelly; but this engagement could not, of course, be fulfilled. The first thing after breakfast he went to the friend by whom the matter had been arranged, and announced his intention. Of course he was met with many bitter reproaches; called a cur, and a fool; and one remarked, "Poor Ned, he's gone off his chump (*i.e.* mind) at last." "I thought it would come to that before long," remarked his companion; "you see, the loss of Doggett's coat did him no good." Ned overheard these free criticisms, and observed, "No, Jerry, I never was in my right mind before; but I am now, thanks be to God." And with many more words did he converse with them of the new feelings which filled his breast. But in vain. They could not understand "the babbler." Convinced that he was mad, they resolved to quit his company; but one of them, who was more kind-hearted than the rest, saw him home; and when he reached the humble cottage was convinced that Ned's madness was not altogether unenviable.

Instead of spending the evening, as he would probably have done but for his conversion, in the public-house, among ungodly associates, he accepted an invitation to attend a place "where prayer was wont to be made." The preacher of the preceding evening was there, and gave Ned such advice as he thought suitable, and furnished

him with a little help in his poverty. But his great desire now was honourably to gain his livelihood. He spent some time in seeking employment, and at last he succeeded in getting a job of digging up a gentleman's garden ; but, after working with great zest for the whole day, he was much disheartened by receiving only one shilling, with some stale crusts and a piece of mouldy cheese. Next Sabbath evening Astley's Theatre was closed, in consequence of the disappearance during the week of the lessee ; and the writer well remembers seeing the crowd of working people that assembled at the foot of Westminster Bridge to hear some speakers address them from a window in the corner house ; but little knew that Ned was one of them, and that he had startled every one by the remarkable story of his life and new birth.

Not unnaturally he was asked why he could not return to his old occupation as lighterman. The fact was, however, that before his conversion he worked without a license, but this he would not do now, as it would not be honest or fair. The cost of such a document was between two and three pounds, and through the goodness of some Christian friends the money was raised, and Ned soon found employment. Unfortunately, however, a man who had long known him as a rogue, informed his employer, and although Ned had been by that time, through sobriety, ability, and general good conduct, promoted to the post of foreman lighterman, he was thrown once more upon the world. It was a hard trial, but Ned felt called upon to bear it cheerfully. By doing odd jobs he succeeded in gaining bread for himself and family ; and in the evening he and his wife went to a night school to pick up a little of the three neglected "r's."

CHAPTER VIII.

“Mother, give us some bread.”—Prayer answered.—Ned selling Bibles.—The pipe.—Ned’s first temptation.—Ned learns humility at Victoria Dock.—Ned learns the power of prayer.

FOR more than thirteen weeks poor Ned tramped the streets of London seeking work, and finding none. During this time some Christian friends gave a little assistance, and Mrs. Wright laboured day and night at the washing-tub, until she fell ill through over-work. Ned describes this as one of the most trying seasons in the whole course of his life ; for having parted with nearly everything in the house that would realize a halfpenny, he and his wife sat one evening gazing at the few embers in the fire-grate, without any articles that could be pawned, when in came the little ones from the street, in which they had been playing, crying out both at once, “Mother, give us some bread ; I am so very hungry.” The saddened parents were unable to answer, and, after looking at one another for a few minutes, Ned broke the silence by asking, “Isn’t there any bread in the house, mate ?” when, walking to the cupboard, she produced a piece about the size of a penny loaf from the shelf, and having asked the Divine blessing upon the frugal meal, she divided the bread between the two children.

Ned very touchingly describes his emotions : “At this moment there began a most terrible struggle between my soul and Satan ; the Enemy suggesting that I should get bread for my children anyhow, either by fair means or foul, since even an infidel would do that. Here I buried

my face in my hands, and cried bitterly ; at which my dear wife exclaimed, as she fell down upon her knees and tried to comfort me, ' Oh, Ned, don't cry, but cheer up ; remember that a crust with Christ is better than all the world without Him.' Feeling a little encouraged by these words of comfort, I knelt down by the side of my wife, and asked God to help me ; and within an hour after this prayer we received the intelligence that a Christian man was prepared to give me twenty-five shillings per week to sell Bibles and Testaments among my old companions ; and although this appeared too good to be true, yet we had faith in God to believe that He had thought fit to answer our prayers ; and, indeed, that very day I received a sovereign to enable me to redeem my clothes from the pawnbroker's, and to procure some substantial food.

Here it may be said, that from the time of this offer being made to the present, though Ned has sometimes been brought so low in poverty as to have only a few half-pence in his pocket, yet he has never known what it is to be wholly without the means of supplying the absolute necessaries of life. For three years he sold Bibles in the streets, and with his small salary he managed to save enough to pay off the debts he had contracted in his unconverted days.

The Christian reader will readily understand that, in so great a change as Ned Wright's conversion, all his evil and questionable habits were not conquered without stern conflicts. Drink was a giant power that had been dethroned on the night of his conversion. Since that memorable occasion he has never tasted intoxicating liquors. The cause of so much of his poverty and wretchedness was, therefore, summarily removed without a pang of regret. This was no small moral triumph, and in conquering this infatuating habit he displayed the courage of a hero. But there was the pipe ; what was to be done with that ? All his life he had been a terrible smoker.

Early in the morning, before and after all his meals, going to and returning from his work, in the evening and at night, Ned might have been seen with his pipe. He took it to bed, and sometimes fell asleep with it in his mouth, and if he awoke during the night he would at once relight his pipe. And after his conversion he still felt the fascinating power of the pipe, and remained for a while a slave to his old propensity. Even on the Sabbath, after leaving God's house, he would indulge in this habit.

An American divine has recently given the following concise hints to smokers : " 1. Never smoke when ladies are present. 2. Never smoke in the presence of gentlemen. 3. Never smoke when alone." Several godly brethren endeavoured to enforce the propriety of following this recommendation. Ned listened with respect, and tried again and again to adopt their advice. But the roots of the habit were deep ; and although he abstained on one occasion for a whole week from his practice, he resumed it again. At another time he abandoned it for a month, but again he was overpowered. Determined, however, to succeed, and remembering the proverb relating to the ultimate issues of trying again, he denied himself for about six weeks, when, coming home one night from a meeting that had been held in North London, the temptation once more assailed him with its wonted force. As he was crossing Blackfriars Bridge he passed a gentleman who was smoking a Havannah cigar. The smell was delightful ; poor Ned was enchained by the fascination ; the old appetite was stronger than ever. " Well," reasoned Ned, " there is no harm in smoking, after all. It has a soothing influence, it comforts me, and perhaps God would have me smoke ; and, indeed, there is nothing in His word to prohibit smoking. Many good and pious men have been great smokers." The result of his reasoning was a determination to have a smoke if he could find a tobacco shop open between the bridge and his house ; but if he could

not find one he would regard it as an intimation from God that it was His will he should leave off smoking. Not a very satisfactory way, certainly, of ascertaining the Divine will ; and the fact was—and we need not conceal it—he set about securing a settlement most pleasing to himself. He saw many shops, but found them all closed, and passed by the last on the road home, and found that also to be shut. The Divine will seemed against his desires ; and, on the plea that he had not reached home, he went through the New Cut, where he knew there would be plenty of tobacco shops open, and soon he found the longed-for tobacco and the charming long pipe with its sealing-wax end.

Instead of retiring to rest he sat in his humble garden summer-house smoking his pipe, and surveying the star-bespangled heavens. But his wife was filled with apprehensions lest this habit, however harmless when not immoderate, should become to Ned a temptation to return to other and worse habits. She concluded that it was safer for her husband to abstain altogether from tobacco, and, in her anxiety for his welfare, she earnestly prayed that God would cause the pipe to turn his stomach, that he might be disgusted with it. Ned was meanwhile enjoying his rest, but at length he turned indoors, complaining that he was inclined to vomit. “Thank God for that,” replied his wife ; “for I have been praying to God this last hour to cause that pipe to turn your stomach. Oh, Ned, you are surely taking a wrong step in resuming that pipe. You have given up all for Jesus, and now you have gone back to one of your old habits, so connected with our past unhappiness and misery. I’m sure you have not asked God to bless the pipe to your benefit and His glory.” Ned made the matter a subject for prayer, and abandoned the pipe altogether. Since that time his wife has had no cause to fear consequences which might follow smoking.

If this story illustrates the simplicity and genuineness

of Ned's piety, so also does the following, the first temptation that presented itself after conversion. It occurred at the time when Ned was in great poverty through not obtaining employment. He wandered down to the water-side between Blackfriars and Waterloo Bridges, and observing several vessels waiting the tide to go up through the bridges, the thought struck him that if he could get off to some of these craft he might obtain the job of navigating some of them up the river. A waterman who knew Ned, and who was rejoiced to hear from him that he had given up all his dishonest practices, lent him one of his boats to endeavour to get a job. Ned thereupon rowed towards Waterloo Bridge, and as it was nearly low water, he saw, just above the bridge, something black, lying half-concealed in the mud, and having the appearance of a dead body. Rowing his boat aground, and stripping off his shoes and stockings, he waded through the mud, and found the black substance to be a large tarpauling, used for protecting the cargoes of barges navigating the river. Having washed the mud off his prize, and hauled it into his boat, he found the tarpauling to be new and valuable.

While thus occupied he was observed by the captain of a billy-buoy lying close at hand, who seemed somewhat vexed that he had not picked up the prize, as he had seen it before Ned had arrived. The captain called out, "Don't take that away, young man; I'll give you ten shillings for it." Ned was confounded; he looked first at the prize, then at the man; he had found the article, he wanted his breakfast, and so did his children, and ten shillings were worth having in his poverty-stricken condition. What was he to do? Something seemed to say to him, "Ned, it is not yours to sell." So he washed off the mire, and discovering a name on it, he resolved at once to return it to its proper owner. The enraged captain, when told by Ned that he "was converted the other day," and could not sell the article, all the more as the owner's name

was upon it, remonstrated with Ned for being a fool ; but he insisted that the word of God said, "Let him that stole steal no more," and rowed away from the tempter, only, however, to be troubled by another, who seemed to say to Ned, "What a fool you are to refuse that half-sovereign ! if you return the tarpauling to the owner, perhaps he will only give you the price of a pot of beer, or a glass of grog, for all your trouble, and yet your wife and little ones are starving at home. You have been asking God to supply your wants, and now He has put this thing in your way, and you refuse the gift. If God had not intended you to benefit by it to the amount of ten shillings, you would never have seen it." To Ned, unaccustomed as he was to specious reasoning, these injections of Satan seemed very plausible. He rowed a little reluctantly down the river ; "Satan," as he puts it, "seemed to clog the sculls," and the boat appeared as disinclined as himself to leave the ten shillings behind. And yet Ned felt convinced he was only acting rightly in refusing the captain's offer, and was glad that he had had sufficient courage to resist the temptation. Having reached the shore opposite Paul's Wharf pier, he went at once to the owner of the tarpauling, and informed him of the recovery of the lost article. Mr. — was glad, looked over his purse as if searching for some small coin ; and Ned, fearing that a sixpence might be offered him, was surprised to hear the gentleman say, "Young man, I have no smaller change than half a sovereign ; I daresay you have had a deal of trouble with the tarpauling, so take that, and I'm much obliged."

Was it possible ! He looked first at Mr. — and then at the gold coin in blank astonishment. Half a sovereign ! honestly obtained ! the very same sum the captain had offered him ! "Glory be to God !" shouted Ned, as he ran down with frantic delight to the boat ; "my Jesus does all things well !" He rowed with speed to the other side of the river, and hurried home, and

showed his wife the half-sovereign, and told her how God had enabled him to resist the temptation, and had rewarded him with His goodness. And they both knelt together in prayer, with hearts full of gratitude, for "grace to help in time of need." "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation ; for when he is tried he shall receive a crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

Ned had not long entered upon his "new life" before he was surrounded by temptations of still greater potency than the one we have just described. His old companions sought by cunning devices to bring him again under subjection to evil. While he was seeking their best welfare, they laid traps to undermine his integrity. His little sermons to them about the love of Jesus Christ were ridiculed, although their power was really felt. The barge-men with whom he had so frequently been intoxicated tempted him with drink, and laughed with scorn when he told them that, although not a pledged teetotaler, he had given up all alcoholic drinks. "No more of that for me," he cried, as they offered him a full pot to drink ; "I've had my share of it, and now I have turned it all up ; for God has pardoned my sins, and I am a different man now. 'Old things have passed away, and all things have become new.' I have given up my old ways, and am happy in my Saviour." And so he told them at the bar of the public-house how sinners were saved and brought into the fold of Christ. The men were silenced ; they could not understand the matter. As his employer's son said, Ned was regarded as the last person in the world to turn from his drinking habits.

During the first week of his foremanship Ned sent five barges to Victoria Dock at high water, with two men in each, while he followed in his barge alone. Having arrived at the dock in due course, he made his barge fast to the floating pier. The tide was just then running out

very hard, and before he could get his oars put in, and prepare to drop his barge clear of the pier, to allow the passenger steamboat to approach, the pierman cast off the rope which held Ned's barge, and sent him adrift, although the passenger boat was then at Blackwall. This was a malicious act, and Ned's anger was so roused that the consequences might have been serious had the pierman been at hand. Away went the barge, the tide taking her still farther and farther from the shore, and drifting her right over to the other side. Ned was at a loss to know what to do, having no anchor to let go, and nothing on which to lay hold to check her course. At last a Christian man, master of a small tug, observed Ned's dilemma, and steaming after the barge he took the headfast, and towed the barge back to the pier, and laid her athwart the lighter.

Ned at once remonstrated with the pierman for his unkind action, upon which he became abusive, and made use of the disgusting language so common among low men when provoked. The same day Ned was again irritated by similar abusive words, and at last was so angered that he seized the man by his coat-collar, ran him violently along the pier to the extreme edge, and threatened to throw him overboard. Never was man held in a more powerful grasp, and it would have been easy for Ned to carry out his intention. But just as he was about to let go he remembered God, and was troubled. Immediately he dragged the man back, and walked off the pier.

The wretchedness that filled his soul at that moment Ned has not forgotten. The peace of mind which had once filled his heart with joy had departed. He had permitted Satan to master him, and had pained his Saviour. During the whole of the day his remorse was great, and when he got home he sought his heavenly Father, and confessed with bitterness of soul his sin. His old feelings, however, were not restored; as he wended his way to the Gospel Hall he felt self-condemned

and unhappy. He was not the same joyous believer of yesterday, but a backslider.

One of the working men who addressed the meeting that evening observed Ned's dejected look, and Ned thought he knew all that had occurred. At the conclusion of the service the preacher addressed him, and inquired the reason of his dejection. Ned frankly told him all. "You must," said the preacher, "go to that man and confess your fault before you can get peace." "But," said Ned, "I've confessed it to God; is not that sufficient?" "No," was the reply, "it is evidently not sufficient, or your peace would have returned. You must go to the man himself and confess your sin, and tell him how much you have grieved God by it. For the Scripture said, 'Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.'* You must indeed do it, Ned, before you can have peace with God." "But," was Ned's rejoinder, "he is an unconverted man." "No matter," was the reply; "it must be done."

This was perhaps the severest trial of all. Ned's natural pride and feelings of self-respect rose against such a humiliation of himself before an adversary who had wronged him so maliciously. "I can't humble myself before him," he said to himself. "It's no use, I can't do it. The man was the first aggressor, he cast off the rope; had it not been for the owner of the steam tug a whole tide's work would have been lost. How can I submit to this man of all others? He would tell it out to all his mates and acquaintances that Ned Wright had begged his pardon." Ned felt he would rather submit to a heavy thrashing than to the humiliation of begging his enemy's forgiveness.

* Matt. v. 23, 24.

And yet he could not bear the intolerable load of misery which weighed upon his spirits. He sought refuge in sleep, but "nature's kind restorer" could not bring him relief. He endeavoured to pray, but found something clogging his utterance. Next morning he went as usual to his work, but his mind was occupied with thoughts that distressed him. He knew that he must go through the trial. He pictured himself going on to the pier, begging his enemy's pardon, and hearing in return the sneer, and bitter taunt, and jeering laugh. He had been unaccustomed to such a scene. Before his conversion he would have disdained the thought of submission, and for ever dispelled it from his mind; but now he could not shake off these feelings. Every sound he heard had for its echo "Victoria Dock," and at every step he took he seemed to confront "Victoria Dock." Next morning he found himself at Fenchurch Street station. How he got there he scarcely knew; but being there he took a ticket for Blackwall. Leaving the train he walked on the pier. The boat was there waiting to convey passengers to Victoria Dock, and Ned half wished she would start before he could reach her. The struggle between the flesh and the spirit here reached its climax. He had fought bravely with members of the "ring," and had not been troubled with misgivings and fears; but this conflict vexed him more than any other. Standing undecided as to what he should do, with one foot on the bulwark rail of the boat and the other on the edge of the pier, the boat at last moved off, and a voice cried, "Look out, governor, or you'll be overboard." Now was the decisive moment. He must either jump one way or the other, or fall into the river; just as he was about to spring on to the pier a hand behind seized and pulled him on board the boat. He had no alternative now; he must go to Victoria Dock. On his arrival there he saw the very man he so much dreaded stationed to collect the passengers' tickets as they

landed. Ned's heart began again to quake. He walked round the boat several times, allowing every passenger to land but himself. His turn, however, came; and so giving up his ticket, he said to the man, "George, I want to see you."

"I should think you did," was the reply, "after the manner you served me yesterday. Why, you might have drowned me."

"Well," said Ned, "the fact is, George, I was converted a little while ago, and I now confess to you how very wrong I was to act toward you as I did yesterday. It has made me very miserable and unhappy ever since, and I am compelled to come and acknowledge myself in fault, and beg of you to forgive me. It is a wonder, George, that I did not throw you overboard; for you know what a character I have been in times past, before God, in the greatness of His mercy, converted me. Ah, George, I would have thrown you into the river then; but now God's preventing mercy restrained me. I shall be contented and happy now that I have told you, and I am sure you won't take further notice of it, or be offended. The Lord, I know, has pardoned all my sins, and saved my soul; and I feel deeply grieved that I should so soon offend Him who has done so much for me. You will forgive me, George, won't you?"

Ned had touched the pierman's heart, and he burst into tears. They both went into the cabin, at George's request, and the latter, addressing Ned, said that he had a praying mother, but he was still a wicked man, without God, unsaved, and sure of being eternally lost. Weeping like a child, he inquired of Ned what he should do.

"Shall I pray for you?" asked Ned.

"Yes, do," was the reply, "pray God to save me now—
• at once."

The two burly men knelt down in the cabin, and Ned besought God's mercy for his companion. While they

were thus engaged three or four lightermen came and stood over the hatchway, and hearing Ned's fervent supplications, they sought to interrupt him by throwing in their midst a "bollard," or large piece of wood. It scarcely touched Ned's leg, and did not hinder him. When they arose the lightermen laughed at them, and mocked their prayers; and so they moved farther away from the hatchway, out of sight, and Ned produced his Testament, which he always carried in his pocket; but, not being a good reader, he asked his friend to read the well-known verse which Martin Luther once happily designated "the gospel in miniature,"—the 16th of the 3rd chapter of John's Gospel. Ned expounded as well as he could the meaning of the message, and in simple language entreated George to believe on Jesus Christ, whom God had sent for his salvation.

George's eyes were opened to see the spiritual significance of the words Ned had chosen for his text. He realized the forgiveness of sins, and by the simple act of faith in Christ he found the peace which passeth all understanding. They rejoiced together, and praised God for the mercy He had shown them both.

The extreme simplicity of Ned's religious life cannot be better illustrated than by the following story. Shortly after the occurrence at the Victoria Dock he was engaged in obtaining gravel from a dredging machine in the Thames. He had undertaken the work of his employer by contract, and therefore endeavoured to economise, by taking up the empty barge himself; but it was necessary to have two men on board when the barge was laden with the gravel to guide it safely through the arches of the various bridges, especially those at Chelsea and Battersea. On one occasion Ned went up the river as usual with a large empty barge, capable of carrying seventy tons, giving strict orders to one of his men to join him at high water when the barge was loaded. High water

came, but no assistant; and, no casual helper being at hand, Ned was alarmed, knowing that it would be the height of imprudence to attempt single-handed to pilot the barge through so dangerous a bridge as that at Chelsea. If it struck against the pier, instead of taking the arch in the centre, it would be sure to sink. While thus perplexed he was aroused by a man on board the dredger asking him if he did not think the barge was deep enough loaded. Ned at once sprang to his feet, and found that she was already overloaded. The dredger was thereupon stopped, the fastened ropes were cast off, and another empty barge let in to load. The ebb tide drifted the full barge down the river, and before him was the dreaded bridge. He was now at his wits' ends, being certain of striking against the piers.

In his extremity he sought the Lord. He ran down into the cabin, thinking that a retired spot was essential to prayer, crept up aft right under the deck, and entreated God to help him out of his difficulty, telling Him that it was impossible to guide the barge through the bridge alone without help, and it was not his fault the man had not kept his word. He forgot for the moment that he ought to be on deck, working as well as praying; and so, leaving his retirement, he went above, and, to his great astonishment, he saw the heavily laden barge driving straight through the centre of the arch, not needing any guidance. The best skilled lightermen could not have done better. And so, when he had cleared the bridge, he shouted with joy, and sang, so loudly as to surprise the people on the bridge, one of the revival hymns which he knew so well—

"Glory, glory everlasting,
Be to Him who bore the cross."

From that time Ned believed intensely in the power of prayer.

CHAPTER IX.

Little Edward's testimony and death.—Louisa's conversion.—Work among lightermen.—The pickpocket.—The dying policeman.—Ned's work as a Bible agent.—Ned confounded by a sceptic.—Singing with children in the street.

AT the time of his conversion Ned's firstborn son was six years of age. From his birth he had been an extremely delicate child, and little indeed able to bear the treatment he received when his father was in a drunken fit. Ned's sudden change of conduct seemed to give a shock to his little boy's system, and now that the excitement in which the child was constantly living had subsided, his delicate state of health was more manifest. The children attended the house of God as regularly as their parents, and it was more than once observed how marked was the attention which little Edward paid to the services. He evidently understood much of what the preachers said, and he appeared lost in thought when in simple words the story of Jesus' love and His death on the cross for sinners was related. It was feared by some neighbours that his close attention to these topics might affect his mind, and cause him to be subject to melancholy, and his mother was advised not to bring him so often to the place of worship. The little fellow, however, soon gave evidence by his conversation and inquiries that he had emotions in his heart which were the fruit of the indwelling Spirit of God. He would take some of his father's tracts and put them under the doors of the neighbours' houses; and those who probably would have repelled a grown-up person received with interest a tract from the little missionary.

At last, however, he grew very weak, and was compelled to keep his bed. It was a sad trial to his parents, who had taken even a deeper interest in him since what they believed to be his conversion, but they were persuaded that the Lord was calling little Edward to his heavenly home. He received every attention possible, but his case was hopeless. His mother was about to put on him a mustard plaster, but he begged she would not, as it would not do him any good. "I'm going," said he, in such pathetic tones as sank into his mother's heart, "to be with Jesus : it is far better, and it won't be long, mother." The father came home just as he was entreating his mother not to weep, since he was going to live with Jesus in heaven. "Teddy," said his father, "are you sure your sins are all forgiven? because, you know, only such can enter the kingdom of heaven." "Oh, yes, father," was the reply, "they are all washed away in the blood of Jesus." While his parents were weeping bitterly he gasped out, "O Jesus, O Jesus;" and as he uttered the words the third time his spirit took its flight to the Saviour whom he so fondly and so simply loved.

The death of her brother caused a great change in the deportment of Louisa, Ned's eldest daughter. Her brother had frequently talked to her of the Saviour, and her parents made her the special object of earnest prayer. Their prayers were answered, and little Louisa was only six years old when, at a large meeting of Sunday-school children, she ventured to ask the teacher who conducted the service whether she might be allowed to tell her little friends how she was converted. Every one was surprised, Ned most of all; and her simple story, so unaffectedly told, brought tears into many eyes, and caused some to exclaim, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God has perfected praise." Since then she has manifested by her daily conduct the reality of the work of God in her young heart; and, although only between ten and eleven

years of age, she is a great help and comfort to her parents.

Among the lightermen of the Thames the news of his conversion quickly spread, and Ned was for some time the subject of their conversation. He had hitherto been shunned by them as a reprobate character, unworthy of their society and confidence. And now that he was a changed man, and was engaged in Christian labour, they suspected him of being a hypocrite. For some time they refused to be convinced of his sincerity, declaring it to be utterly impossible that such a vagabond should be converted. One of their number, however, was more open to reason, and he resolved to hear Ned speak at the first opportunity. A lighterman's tea meeting was soon afterwards given, and this man, with his wife, attended it out of curiosity. Two or three Christian men addressed the lightermen, and among them was Ned, who seemed to produce quite an impression upon his old companion. At the close of the meeting Ned went to him, and said, "Well, old chap, have you a desire to be saved?" The inquiry was felt to be very direct, and he replied, "I'm convinced there is something in this, but I cannot stay to talk about it now; it's more than mere excitement. I believe there is a reality about the matter that I have not yet understood. It is perfectly true what you have said to-night; no man could by any means act the part you have taken to-night, of himself. No, Ned, there must be something here that I have not got. I see I am in a dangerous position, and need a Saviour as well as you."

Ned was delighted with his friend's answer; and at once he invited him and his wife into an adjoining room, where he might still further converse with them. There they knelt down in prayer, Ned pleading with the Lord on their behalf; and after conversing with them about the gospel of the grace of God, light dawned upon their minds,

and with joy they left the room, believing that God had, for the sake of Christ, forgiven them their sins.

The news of this man's conversion spread rapidly among his associates, and they were surprised to find him telling the story to all within his reach. This led to another lighterman, who was bitterly prejudiced against Ned, and would believe anything of him but that he was a reformed man, listening to Ned's addresses. Taking his wife with him, he went into the hall where Ned was announced to speak, and heard with much interest the earnest address given to the unconverted. The service also powerfully touched the hearts of this man and his wife, and both eventually became exemplary Christians. One man is now the deacon of a church, and the other a leading speaker at a "gospel hall," the latter being greatly useful in promoting the knowledge of Jesus Christ among the men stationed on board the fire-brigade floats.

Ned gives us an instance of the kind of treatment he received as an open-air preacher about this time. He says: "Not long after my conversion I felt a desire to stand at the corner of the streets and tell of the love of Jesus to poor sinners. I got a board for this purpose, upon which I had some texts of Scripture, and also a light for the purpose of showing them more plainly to the people. One Saturday night I had a very large company, and, in the midst of my speaking, a man at the back of the crowd, who was one of my old companions, threw a stone weighing nearly half a pound, which whizzed by my ears like the sound of a child crying, and made a dent on my board, which was on a level with my head, quite a half-inch in depth. This man was a Romanist of the most bitter kind. He was caught, but promising not to do it again, I told them to release him; but he had scarcely left the place when I felt it my duty solemnly to warn the people of the anger of God. I announced in a loud tone of voice several passages of Scripture, especially dwelling

upon this one : 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' This had the desired effect upon a young man in the crowd, who had only that morning returned from Wandsworth prison, after six months' hard labour for felony. He now began his evil practices again, and in his first attempt he succeeded in getting 'a solicitor' (*i.e.* a white handkerchief). He made another attempt in the hope of getting a silk one this time ; but while his hand was in the gentleman's pocket he heard the Scripture, which came like a thunderbolt to his conscience ; and so, dropping down upon his knees, he screamed out to God to have mercy upon him. Here the gentleman was advised by several of the bystanders to give him in charge, and prosecute him ; but as a Christian he declined doing so, preferring to leave the man in the hands of God, praying that He would save his precious soul, which we have every reason to believe was accomplished that night. Providing him with lodging and food till Monday, he was taken to a home, where he conducted himself in a proper manner, and was eventually got into a situation, and I believe he is employed there at the present time."

From the first Ned was not only useful among his old workmen, and the class of dishonest men to which he had belonged, but also among the policemen. In former days they were but too well acquainted with him, courting his company, and asking after his welfare too freely. "Several times," says Ned, "did I have the opportunity of addressing the police in a body, and then I would pick out the men who at various times had me in their custody, and would tell them what a character I was, as they well knew, and also what God had graciously done for my soul ; and at the same time I would urge them to believe on that Saviour who had changed me and made me a new creature in Christ Jesus. At one of these meetings an elderly man, a detective, belonging to the south of London,

sat listening to me. On several occasions he had sought me before my conversion, and although he was considered to be one of the cleverest men in his division, yet he never had the luck to find me out. Eagerly did he listen, as if riveted to the seat, to all that was said ; and after the meeting I went to him in the hope of saying something personally to him of the Saviour ; but he declined to hear, and abruptly left the place.

“ Some time after this I was with the Bible carriage near the ‘Elephant and Castle,’ and gathering a few people around me I read portions of God’s word to them, telling them also of the love of Christ ; and, far outside the crowd, who should I spy but my friend the detective ! and as I waxed rather warm in my work, I observed him take out his handkerchief, and wipe away a tear from his eye, though at the same time he professed to be wiping his face ; but my eye was upon him now, and I saw that his emotions were very strong. He tried to conceal his feelings, but it was only too plain that he was broken-hearted, and went away because he could not listen any further.

“ A short time after, whilst preaching at the hall, a tall lady-like-looking person came in, and at the close of the service, addressing me, said, ‘ You will perhaps excuse me, sir, but are you “ Ned Wright, the converted burglar ? ” ’ ‘ I am,’ said I. ‘ Then, sir,’ said she, ‘ you are the person my husband talks so much about. He has been an infidel all his life ; but he is now very ill, and says that you haunt him day and night, asleep or awake, and that he is continually thinking of you. I know he is not on the right road : but he wants to see you ; will you come ? ’ She spoke so earnestly, and so like a child of God, that I took her to be a Christian, and so I promised to call at once upon her husband. What was my surprise, on arriving at the house, to find that it was my old friend, the detective, on his dying bed ! I shook hands with him, and then came direct to the point about the salvation of his soul,

and the greatness of the love of Christ for all poor sinners, and the way by which sinners could be saved. But the dying man cried out, 'O Ned, O Ned, say no more—say no more; I cannot bear it, it will break my heart.' 'Would to God it may!' I replied; 'for then there would be two broken hearts together. Reproach broke the heart of Jesus; let the word break your heart, and then Jesus will heal it for you; for it is His delight to heal the broken-hearted.' 'Oh, but Ned,' said the poor fellow, 'I've been such a sinner! my sins, too, are of a more peculiar kind than those of other people; if policemen will aspire to be sergeants, they will sometimes seek their ends by unfair means; and I, like many others, did not attain my position in the force in the most honourable way, and I feel it bitterly to-day.' 'But,' said I, soothingly, 'the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin, and whosoever believeth on Him shall be saved.' This led the poor man to see that there was 'life for a look at the crucified One,' and looking he lived. Shortly after he fell asleep in Jesus, rejoicing in His name. His wife and daughter both became Christians, and are glorifying God by consistent walk and conversation."

As a Bible agent Ned had many opportunities of serving the Lord in unexpected and unlooked-for ways. To have confined him to the observance of certain rules would have crippled his efforts and spoiled his work. He was not content with selling Bibles and Testaments to those who made application for them. He as frequently read or recited portions to the passers-by, and was always ready to expound, so far as he could, the meaning of those passages which referred more directly to the work of Christ in the redemption of man. His experiences in this department of Christian labour were greatly useful in awakening the careless. One day, whilst standing opposite Christ's Church in the Blackfriars Road, he was asked the price of a Bible by a man who told him that he had

been very ungodly, but he would like to know how God could righteously pardon such a sinner as he. Ned told him in a few simple words, and the poor man was much comforted, and went away believing that there was mercy even for him. There was a group of persons around, to whom Ned gave suitable tracts, and spoke of the love of his Master. For some time he was with his Bible carriage in the New Cut, a low and crowded market street in South London, and each evening he had congregations varying from one hundred to several hundreds of persons, to whom he preached Jesus Christ. "On one occasion, when I had finished speaking," he reports in the chronicle of the work done by the mission with which he was then connected, "and while some of the brethren were singing a hymn, I went amongst the crowd, and distributed tracts. A gentleman extended his hand for one, and said that he had been a Sunday-school teacher, and had prayed very much; still he could not say as I could, that he had everlasting life, nor could he realize peace. I explained that peace was the result of pardon, and pardon was the result of faith in the precious blood of Jesus which cleanseth from all sin.

"Some time afterwards, when in Stamford Street, several persons, after I had been speaking, bought Bibles and Testaments. One young man, who lingered about the carriage, I felt constrained to speak to; so I told him simply of the great love of Christ in dying for lost sinners, and asked him if he had not proved it. He said that he had just left home, being out of work; his mother and sisters were believers, and were continually asking God to show him the error of his way, and he wished he had not spoken to me, as he felt truly miserable, and the whole of his sins seemed to come up before him. 'Thank God for that,' said I, 'and now is your time to take them to Jesus; He casts out none who come to Him.' With this the young man went away broken-hearted, and a deeply convicted sinner.

“ Some short time after this the same young man came up to me when I was standing at the corner of Trinity Street, Borough, and said, ‘ I have been looking for you, sir, to thank you for your kindness to me in telling me that day in Stamford Street the way in which I could be saved. Thank God, sir, I can now say that Jesus is mine. I am rejoicing in Him as a redeemed sinner, pardoned through His blood, which He shed on Calvary.’ ”

Sometimes Ned’s appearance in the neighbourhoods where he was so well known, and the novel modes to which he resorted for securing an audience, produced quite a sensation. Thus, he took his Bible barrow into a street in Rotherhithe, in which there was a large day-school, and planted himself opposite the building just before twelve o’clock. At this hour the little ones, he knew, would leave the school, and a number of workmen would be flocking past on their way home to dinner. After patiently waiting a little time the children came running from school, and seeing Ned with his barrow, not unnaturally flocked around him. Holding three or four attractive “ picture-books ” in his hand, he invited the little ones to come to him ; and when they did so he said, “ I want you to sing me that pretty hymn beginning,

‘ I think when I read that sweet story of old,’

and if you will I’ll give one of these pretty books to the three best singers.” The children were of course delighted, and the competition for prizes began.

Their musical voices soon charmed up the windows, and brought out the neighbours. The workmen stayed and listened to the sweet songsters. When they had finished Ned spoke for a few minutes ; then they resumed singing, and preaching followed. It was a pleasing sight, and all were delighted, the children gaining more prizes than had been offered in the first instance.

“ Having been away from this neighbourhood for some

years," says Ned, "I imagined that the people would not recognize me, but I found the reverse to be the case ; for in less than a quarter of an hour an old woman who remembered me made it her special business to run up and down from door to door, bearing the intelligence that I was Ned Wright. And never shall I forget the delightful scene that took place as soon as the men came back from their dinner on their way to their work, some of them evidently filled with surprise, and others, who were Christians, glorifying God for the marvellous change."

CHAPTER X.

Preaching in the New Cut: an exciting scene.—Among the hop-pickers.—Rescue of a "gentleman thief."—Anxiety to labour among thieves.—Resigns his situation as Bible agent.—Lives by faith.—Hires the penny gaff.—Prayer answered.—A new overcoat.—Scene in a railway carriage.—Light out of darkness.

THE street market in the New Cut affords a sight once witnessed never to be forgotten. The poorest classes of South London purchase here most of the necessaries of life in smaller quantities, and perhaps at a cheaper rate, than in any other district. The road is lined on each side with costermongers' barrows, sellers of stay-laces, trinkets, stationery, herbs, and common wares. Whether such a street is the best in which to preach may be debatable; the fact, however, that there were so many persons passing who might be disposed to listen was too tempting to Ned; and notwithstanding the possibility of inconveniences arising from a crowd, he resolved to make the street the scene of some of his evangelistic labours. The inconvenience could not have been at any time greater than that ordinarily arising from the interest excited by the fervid eloquence of "Cheap Jack," and the police did not at first interfere with Ned's open-air efforts. Some, indeed, were Christian men; and while the speaker chose a suitable corner, they approved of his mission. One day, however, witnessed a complete change in the district police; for it happened that a somewhat officious Roman Catholic sergeant had been put upon the New Cut beat. In the evening Ned took his barrow into a quiet by-street, and began to offer his Bibles for sale, and to speak to

those who had collected around him. In the course of time he gathered a crowd of nearly a thousand people, who listened attentively to the speaker's story. In the midst of his address the police sergeant pushed his way through the crowd, and in a rude and ungentlemanly manner peremptorily ordered Ned to dismount.

"Come down, sir; we don't want any of your clap-trap here."

"Ay, sergeant," said Ned, smiling, "that's just what I'm trying my best to do—to keep these poor people out of your trap."

Pleasantries and expostulations however failed to change the sergeant's purpose, and although the people entreated him to let the preacher alone, he threatened Ned that if he did not speedily remove he would lock him up. Of course the books were gathered together, and Ned began to move. Meanwhile about forty persons standing by struck up a tune :

"Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus took my sins away."

Ned, however, was not to be beaten. He had not given the sergeant any provocation, and he believed that if the man had not exceeded, he had at least gone to the extreme boundary-line of his duty. "Cheap John" was permitted to shout with the voice of a bassoon; why should not Ned "testify" with not inferior lungs to the virtues of his superior wares? Knowing that the police could not interfere with him if he only kept moving on, with a steady and tantalizing step he proceeded along the New Cut, wheeling his own barrow, preceded by a Christian man carrying the naphtha lamp, and followed by a company of sympathising brethren singing most lustily.

It was Saturday evening, at an hour when the New Cut was more than ordinarily crowded; and as the singers marched along, preceded by Ned—who, we dare say, sang

as lustily as any—the crowd became so great that the street was rendered impassable, and “Cabby” could not make headway. Ned was by no means desirous of causing so great an inconvenience, and was purposing to leave the street, when the sergeant pressed his way to Ned, and urged him to “move on.”

“Why, you see, my friend,” replied Ned, “that is impossible; there are so many people here: however we’ll just show you a little of that commodity that you would not grant us just now—namely, grace;” and so saying he exhorted the people to move away on their own respective business, adding that he intended occupying the same spot from which he had been ejected on the following Saturday evening. This he did without any interference on the part of the sergeant, who evidently gave him up as incorrigible; and from eight o’clock in the evening until ten minutes to twelve at night he spoke to the large crowds that assembled.

Ned perambulated not only the metropolis, but also the suburbs and country towns and villages, with his Bible carriage, and of his experiences at this time many interesting chapters might be written. It will suffice, however, to indicate a few of them. In some cases unexpected friends, mostly of the labouring poor, feeling interested in his work, provided him with food and a lodging. One day, in driving his Bible carriage down a steep hill, he allowed it to run into a bank, and unfortunately overturning it, the body of the carriage was seriously damaged, and two large squares of glass were smashed, the broken pieces cutting several of his most expensive Bibles. Not being within sight of any habitation, he hardly knew what to do. He envied for a moment the happiness of the buzzing bee and the warbling birds, and wished he could sing as joyously as they. But there was his broken carriage; how could he be otherwise than miserable as he gazed upon its shattered frame? However he fell on his knees, and

besought God to help him in his time of trouble. When he had concluded a labouring man stood by his side, and addressing him, said, "Cheer up, old fellow, your Father has heard your prayer, and has sent me to help you." The Bibles and Testaments were then picked up, and with the assistance of a family of hop-pickers, who were returning home with their wages in their pockets, the carriage was raised from the ground. These persons each bought a Bible, selecting those that were the most damaged; then they helped him down the hill with his carriage; afterwards they knelt together in prayer, and in that strange place God was pleased to teach some of the hop-pickers that they were sinners, and needed His grace. In about a quarter of an hour he came upon the gates of Squire B——'s park; the squire himself was outside the railings, and observing the unfortunate condition of the Bible carriage, he inquired how the accident had happened. Ned told him in a few words, and was indeed gladdened at heart to hear the old gentleman tell him to take the carriage to his coach-builder, who would repair it, and for this he was only expected to be thankful to God. While the Bible carriage was under repair Ned lodged, at the squire's request, at the house of one of his servants; and had many opportunities of preaching the gospel to the hop-pickers of the neighbourhood.

"Being very anxious one day to deliver some tracts to a number of hop-pickers, who are a most ungodly class of people, the greater part of them being illiterate Romanists, I began to present my tracts, when an Irishman shouted, 'Come here, ye lazy schamer, and be after picking hops for your living.' This they all seemed heartily to join in; so asking my heavenly Father for wisdom, I said, 'Now, if you like, I'll come and pick for you for two hours, if you will let me spend the third hour in delivering tracts among you.' This they unanimously agreed to, some of them shouting, 'That's a jolly fellow,' 'Now, that's some-

thing like religion.' After picking hops for two hours I was sorry to see my friends rushing out of the rain to some place, I could not tell where. However I prayed to God for help, and followed them, and was not a little surprised and thankful to find that they were seeking shelter in an old barn. Of course, according to our agreement, I began to give my tracts away, when the cry was raised, 'A speech, a speech!' 'All right,' said I, 'but you must let me give my tracts away, then I will give you a speech; I can do it all in an hour.' To this they readily assented, and after delivering the tracts I took my stand upon a tub turned bottom upwards, when some cried out, 'Chair, chair.' 'Stop,' said I; 'my friends, you must not rob me of my half-hour, you know, by talking about forms and ceremonies; we must remember that God is in the chair, or in other words, on the throne, and we are on the earth; so that the little time we are together we must try and remember that God is here.' Feeling that there was no time for me to talk about Romanism and Protestantism, I proceeded to tell them of the dying love of Jesus. This seemed to rivet the whole of the company to the spot; and when I had finished that meeting scores of those hard-hearted Romanists were subdued, and shook hands most heartily with me, heaping upon my head the choicest blessings heaven could give."

Having arrived at Maidstone, Ned passed by the gaol one evening, in company with a friend, to whom he remarked, "Ah, I've spent many bitter hours in that place." Whilst looking at the prison a lad ran up, and said, "That's the place where they hang them, sir." Whilst entering into conversation with him a number of persons were attracted to the spot, all of whom listened to what Ned had to say; and he had not been speaking for more than a few minutes when the crowd increased so much that he began a set address. In the course of his address he referred to his previous bad life, and how he had spent

some few weeks in the prison opposite, for misconduct, as well as in several other prisons for like offences. Several policemen and warders belonging to the prison were among the listeners, and Ned was heartily thanked at the close for his useful and powerful address.

In the course of his evangelistic work among the hop-pickers Ned was both insulted and assaulted by a Romanist, who persisted in declaring that Ned had turned over from Romanism to Protestantism for what he could get. Fortunately an old man and his wife, who happened to be in the room, declared that they knew Wright too well for that. No one would believe the Romanist, who was threatened with a "good hiding" if he did not cease his abuse. In return for his kindness Ned spoke privately to the old man and his wife about the gospel, and on his return to London had the pleasure of visiting the man while suffering from fever, and being the means of his conversion.

During the three years of Ned's employment as a Bible agent he had many opportunities of addressing large numbers of the poorest classes of South London. The mission with which he was connected was carried on in a suitable hall, devoted to preaching services, and here he frequently related the story of his conversion to some of the lowest characters that infest the metropolis. He also spoke at the services in the Victoria Theatre and elsewhere to thousands, who listened as if spell-bound to his wonderful story. One evening, when he had finished, a man came to him, and in a most excited manner told him that he had just been relating his own history ; for his life had been very much like Ned's. The man was taken into the green-room, where Ned read and conversed with him, and prayed for his soul's salvation. It was some time before the soul-stricken man could realize the forgiveness of sins ; but immediately he trusted in the Saviour his face was lit up as with the radiance of a summer's morn. Upon inquiry

it was found that he was connected with a wealthy family ; but having been decoyed from home by some companions, who turned out to be expert thieves, he entered upon evil courses, and became in the end an expert thief himself. He had had a good education, and was superior in intelligence to the ordinary class of thieves. His career of crime soon led to his arrest and imprisonment for four years' penal servitude. Leaving Portland prison, he was persuaded by a Christian man to hear Ned Wright, and this resulted, as we have seen, in his conversion.

A gentleman generously offered to support him for three months, and this offer was accepted. At the end of that time, no other situation being found, he exchanged his suit of broadcloth for corduroy trousers and a white smock, and went gladly and thankfully to work in the East End, to roll barrels about, at eighteen shillings per week. He was, however, soon found to be worthy of a superior berth, and was made a clerk in the counting-house of his employer, where he rose gradually to an important post. Now he is one of the trusted travellers for a large house of business in the city, and an earnest, consistent Christian.

While pleased with the nature of his work as a Bible agent, and gratified with its results, Ned felt increasingly anxious to concentrate his efforts in a neighbourhood to which his gifts were peculiarly suited. A roving evangelism had, of course, its advantages ; but, not unwisely, he thought that if he were to labour in some locality where he could secure the attention of the "roughs," he might be serving God with greater usefulness. He had been hitherto greatly blest among a class supposed to be beyond the reach of ordinary religious efforts. From the first he preferred above all places the New Cut, and having laboured for above two years with the Bible carriage, he named his desire to his employer, in the hope that a small hall might be secured for the peculiar services he could organize. Although not meeting with the hearty

response he had anticipated, he would not give up his project; but went after the "penny gaff" he now occupies, and ascertained the amount of rent and all necessary particulars. He received, however, a denial from his employer, and thinking that possibly it was not the Divine will he should occupy the premises, he resolved to wait patiently for a more favourable opportunity.

At length he concluded three years of his labours in this field, and having acquired much experience, he was better fitted for future work. He had preached not a few times, and addressed many thousand persons while selling the word of God. And the encouragements he had received led him to believe that God had given him a special work to do, viz., to preach to the thieves and other social outcasts of the metropolis. He therefore resigned his situation, and resolved to live dependent upon whatever the goodness of the Lord might supply him. If his way was not made plain to preach the gospel he would go back to his work as lighterman on the Thames, and give his spare time to evangelistic effort. The very next morning a letter came by post, containing twelve shillings in postage stamps, inviting him to preach in Ipswich. This he regarded as an intimation from God to live a life of faith, and from that time to the present we believe he has never made the public acquainted with his *personal* needs, nor asked, directly or indirectly, for the means of his support. Occasionally he has been severely tried, but he has never been heard to complain. One of his leading helpers supplies us with some interesting facts on this subject.

At one time he went to preach at C—, and after doing so with great success, he found on leaving for his lodgings that he had only got fivepence left; and "although he had been kindly received, and urged to come again, still no one thought of asking him a word about expenses, nor did it appear as if any one cared how Ned

lived or fared ;” and so at half-past eight o'clock he started off to the railway station to catch the London train. Although he had only fivepence, he believed that somehow God would take him safely to London. He had not proceeded far when he was accosted by a stranger who had heard him preach on the preceding evening, and received from him a sovereign, with very hearty words of congratulation. On another occasion he preached at B— ; but though he was announced to speak in London on the following evening, he had not the required sum to pay for his travelling expenses. However, in dependence upon God, he went to the railway station, and on his way found he was half an hour too soon for the train. While walking about, a little child stepping up to him said, “ If you please, sir, will you take this book back to the lady whose address is inside the cover ?” Ned opened the book, and retraced at once his steps to that part of the town where the lady resided. On arriving there she expressed her great pleasure in hearing him on the previous evening, and begged his acceptance of a small donation, handing him a £5 note.

One day, while walking through the New Cut, Ned met with six of his old companions, who had just come out of the New Model Prison. They were deplorable in appearance, one having no shoes, another being without a coat, and another was without any covering to his head. Having afforded them some relief, and conversed with them respecting the salvation of their souls, he left them, more than ever resolved to devote his life to preaching to poor thieves. A suitable house was to be had, and as the rent was only £60 per annum, he took it, believing that the Lord would send him the money, and made at once the necessary alterations to fit it for preaching purposes.

The first person to whom he spoke on the subject gave him one sovereign, and the second £10. In less than

three weeks the place was arranged to seat from 200 to 300 persons, and on the night of the opening his heart was rejoiced to find that sinners were converted. As time went on, a band of praying men and women gathered around him, and aided him in his labours. He also rented a small theatre for Sunday evenings under one of the railway arches near the "Elephant and Castle"; then a large concert hall in Bermondsey, and subsequently the penny gaff, in which he still carries on his mission. To obtain the requisite funds for carrying on this work he appealed by means of circulars to the Christian public, his own personal support being left to those friends whom God might move at various times to help him; so that all the money contributed by the public has been wholly devoted to the mission work. If at any time he has been in need of money for the expenses connected with the hall, he and his helpers have resorted to prayer.

The communicant gives one or two illustrations of this practice. "One quarter-day the rent of the hall had to be paid, and Ned had very little money in hand for that purpose. He found, after he had got together all that he could muster, he was £10 short. So he came downstairs—for at that time he was living on the premises—and said to the brethren, 'I want you all to get before the Lord in prayer, for the means of paying the rent; for I'm £10 short, and I have promised to meet the landlord and pay him to-morrow at eleven o'clock.' The gospel meeting then taking place, it was turned into one for prayer, and each one poured his or her soul out to God for help. That night, when the meeting closed, every one present felt sure that the Lord would send the money. The morning came, but the postman passed the door, and there was no letter for Ned. Half-past ten o'clock arrived; Ned was ready to fulfil his appointment, and again he cried unto the Lord; then coming downstairs, he was

going towards the hall door for the purpose of proceeding to the landlord's house, when a man entered, bearing a letter in his hand, which he handed to Ned, who, on opening it, found enclosed in a blank sheet of paper a £10 note ; so he said to the man, ' May I ask who sent this ? ' when the man answered, ' The Lord sent it. ' Thus prayer was heard, and the rent of the hall paid ; and on the ensuing evening the hearts of the members were rejoiced exceedingly. Another time the Lord had withheld supplies, and a gas bill had been overdue for more than six weeks, which amounted to four guineas, and as Ned had no money to pay it, he came down on the night of a fellowship meeting and asked the members to make it a special subject of prayer to God that He would provide the money for the gas bill. One of the brethren, Robert Young, spoke up and said, ' Why, there is £6 18s. in the poor-box, and as all the poor have been cared for, why not use it until money comes in to pay this debt ? How can we ask the Lord to send us money while we have money in the house ? ' And so it was unanimously agreed to by over forty present to pay the money out of the ' Poor-box Fund ' ; and immediately after the Lord graciously sent in sufficient funds to carry on the work, and restore the four guineas back again to the purpose it was intended for."

One day, after preaching at Windsor, Ned managed to tear his long top-coat, of which he was peculiarly fond, because of its clerical and, as he called it, Puseyite appearance ; and all the arts of his contriving wife, with her well-plied needle, could not conceal the defect. Mrs. Wright is as simple-hearted as her husband in her faith in God ; and failing to hide the rent, she knelt down with Ned in prayer that their heavenly Father would provide him with a new overcoat. The next morning the postman delivered a letter bearing the Windsor postmark, in which was a letter addressed to a well-known firm of out-

fitters in the West End. The unsealed letter addressed to Ned was as follows :—

“DEAR NED,—If you will take the enclosed note to Messrs. N——, they will show you an assortment of over-coats. Please fit yourself with one, and return thanks to God for it.

“Yours, etc., etc.”

The letter was anonymous, and the name of the writer is not known to this day. Ned's first feeling was that the letter was a hoax, and that some one wanted to make him a fool. His wife, however, believed that the hand of God was in the matter ; and urged Ned to call upon the firm. This he did, resolving on the way that if this were a trick of Satan's, “he would make him pay for it” by preaching Christ to the people in the shop. However, on reaching the shop, and handing the letter to the shopman, he was shown upstairs, where there was a large collection of top-coats ; and the first one fitting him, he hastily bade the salesman “Good morning,” hurried downstairs into the street, and ran home with childish glee as quickly as possible, to report his good fortune to his wife.

Ned was now getting to be known in the country as a preacher and an effective evangelist ; and so in the summer of 1867 he was invited to attend an evangelical conference announced to be held at Dublin. Before the conference was held he preached, by invitation, in the town of Lurgan, near Belfast. On his way back to Dublin, accompanied by several evangelists of his own class, he found in the same compartment a number of Irishmen, among whom was a Roman Catholic priest. It was with no intention of annoying his “riverence” that he and his friends struck up some new tunes which they had recently learnt ; but their hearts were overjoyed as they thought of the happy scene they had witnessed on the previous

evening, while preaching in Lurgan. In his innocence, too, Ned concluded that not even a Roman Catholic priest would object to the singing of devout hymns ; and so he sang very lustily one hymn after another, to the delight of all in the carriage, excepting the priest in the corner. At last he sang a hymn, of which he was very fond—

“ O Jesus, O Jesus, how vast Thy love to me ! ”

which so exasperated the priest that he jumped up from his seat, and lifting his umbrella over Ned's head, threatened to chastise him severely if he did not cease singing those words. “ He made use,” says Ned, “ of the most blasphemous language I ever heard ; had I been at Bank-side, among the London Irish coal-whippers, I don't believe I should have heard worse language.” Looking at the priest with great astonishment, Ned calmly said, “ Oh, my friend, don't think you will frighten us with your threats and blasphemies. I tell you, sir, that you will one day give an account of this blasphemous language to my Master ; depend upon it, ‘ Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’ You, sir, are sowing this morning to the flesh, and of the flesh you will reap corruption.”

A dead calm followed, and after a little time the brethren, who perhaps would have acted more discreetly by not again provoking the irascible Hibernian, struck up another tune. The priest appealed to the passengers to assist him in putting down the obnoxious “ ranting ” ; but as they rather enjoyed it they declined. This made him yet more exasperated, and he charged them with encouraging heretics. Fortunately they were not distressed thereat, but expostulated with him, observing that the singers were doing no harm, and that he was to blame for making such a fuss over a trifle. It was amusing to hear him threaten them, as the priest of their own church, to subject them to penance.

“How will yer riverence prove us to be wrong?” was the quick reply. “Shure, and ain’t we all of us agreed that we have done nothing, nor said anything? but, yer riverence, ye’ve had all the say to yerself.”

Just at this moment the train stopped, having arrived at the second station, and the priest got on to the platform, crying, as if for his life, “Guard, guard, come here! shure thim two men have insulted me, and continue to do so.”

It appears that the guard was an Orangeman, and not likely to be the tool of the priest; so, having looked at the offenders, he turned round to the complainant, and observed, “These gentlemen appear to be very respectable; you can’t mean that they have insulted you; I am sure they would not do so wilfully.”

“Yes, guard,” said Ned, with unconscious egotism, “we are very respectable gentlemen; for we are sons of the Lord God Almighty.”

“Well,” said the angry priest, “I will report them and you too when I get to Dublin;” and with this he resumed his seat, and the train again moved on. Turning to Ned and his companions he exclaimed, “Arrah, see if I don’t make yer repint of this when yer get to Dublin, my fine gentlemen!”

When they got to Dublin, however, the priest found he had lost his ticket during his state of excitement, and was compelled to pay over again for the whole distance—a misfortune, we fear, that aroused but little sympathy in the heart of Ned; and instead of making further complaints which might have been a little troublesome to the evangelists, the priest had to see the superintendent about his lost ticket. Ned was not a little glad to escape from so ungenial a companion.

While in Dublin Ned met with Mr. H——, an earnest fellow-labourer in the gospel, with whom it was arranged that he should return home, *vid* Holyhead, to Liverpool. On the day of departure from Ireland they found the

boat crowded to excess with Irish labourers, who were leaving Erin to assist in gathering in the English harvest. As is usual at this time of the year, large crowds of these men were conveyed across the channel for the nominal sum of one shilling, and generally they huddle together on the deck, as if they were a number of sheep. Ned and his companion stood on the poop of the steamer, watched the poor fellows with keen interest, and longed to tell them the story of the cross. But they were Roman Catholics, bigoted and ignorant; and for any but a priest to venture to preach to them would be considered by them as an insult to every saint in their calendar, and to the Virgin Mary in particular. Ned dreaded to arouse their ire, as who would not that was at all acquainted with the prejudices and impulsiveness of their class? Instead, therefore, of offering them tracts, or venturing to address them, Ned and his companion silently and earnestly entreated God to deal graciously with the ungodly crew on board, and, if it pleased Him, to open up a suitable way by which they could preach the gospel to them. "Open unto us, we beseech Thee, a door of utterance, that Thy name may be glorified, the gospel of Thy dear Son proclaimed, Thy will be done, and so great an opportunity neither neglected nor lost."

Confusion and noise, the clattering of tongues, crowding, fighting, pushing, swearing, blaspheming—the atmosphere was redolent with curses. What awful society for Christians! The tortures of hell could not be worse. At last the vessel was loosed from its moorings, and quickly leaving the beautiful city of Dublin behind, the steamer passed Kingstown, and steered away for Holyhead. The two Christian men looked upon their fellow-creatures with deep pain, and as they observed their conduct, and heard their oaths and imprecations, it seemed as if there was not one among the dark mass of humanity before them who had not "bowed the knee to Baal." It was no small

comfort to their hearts when they found that the cook of the ship was a pious man, and that there was at least one with whom they might converse. To a man of Ned's impulsive temperament, who had so much to say that was worth the saying, and so kindly a disposition to make the message pleasant even to ordinary objectors, it was no small difficulty to remain silent. The word of God was like fire in his bones. It was a hard struggle to restrain himself, and he was disposed to run all risks to gain a hearing for the gospel. Perhaps, however, if it were impossible while they were on board ship for him to preach to them, it might be his privilege to do so when they had arrived at Holyhead.

A finer day had not been seen for a long while, nor a clearer sky. As the vessel ploughed her way so gaily and gracefully across the waters it was not anticipated that anything would interrupt their course, or mar the little pleasure they had from the beauty of the scene. When, however, they were within an hour's sail from Holyhead they were enveloped in one of those thick yellow-black fogs with which Londoners are painfully familiar, and it reminded Ned and his friend of the thick darkness that fell upon Egypt in the time of God's severe visitation. Ned could not discern a single person on board, nor even his companion that had stood by his side. To move a step forwards or backwards was not easy, since he could not see his own feet, much less a foot ahead. Feeling his way to the front of the poop, he mounted as best he could the skylight, and seizing the opportunity, which he believed God had afforded him in answer to prayer, he shouted out with his stentorian voice, as few men can do, the familiar words of which he is never wearied of repeating, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." These, to him, much-loved words were followed by other and similar passages. The Spirit of

God seemed not only to bring suitable words from the inspired volume to his recollection, but to aid him in their delivery. Text followed text in rapid succession, pronounced with a peculiarly solemn emphasis ; and as there was not a breath of wind stirring, nor another voice, he was heard from bow to stern, although, like Mrs. Beecher Stowe's "Dred" in the trees, no one knew from whence the voice proceeded. Every one seemed startled. A grave silence reigned ; every breath was hushed, and every ear attentive. Never man had a more willing or apparently a more impressible auditory. Naturally a superstitious people, the Irish labourers appeared to regard the voice as superhuman, and as Ned was elevated considerably above them, it required only a vigorous imagination and a cowering fear to conceive, as some confessed afterwards they had conceived, that the heavens were speaking, calling them, as if with the tongue of a trumpet, to repentance and to God.

Meanwhile the captain of the boat was considering as he stood on the bridge the best expedient to adopt to prevent a catastrophe, and to secure the cargo from damage. It was dangerous to proceed just then, as they might dash against another vessel. The speed was therefore eased, and every effort made to secure the boat from harm. But there was Ned crying aloud, "The day of the Lord draweth nigh. Prepare to meet thy God !" Very few men would deem it prudent or wise to adopt such means for impressing the ungodly crew, as to work upon the fears of the ignorant is not the best way of bringing them to a knowledge of Christ. But Ned must not be judged by any other standard than himself. Extraordinary men, placed under extraordinary circumstances, may be privileged to use extraordinary means. The cuckoo cry of "sensationalism" is not always the wisest, and prudence may surely give place occasionally to a righteous expediency, since prudence has almost an unlimited sway. Anyhow

we are chronicling facts ; and if they are unusual in character, the results were surely such as justified the means.

For twenty minutes the darkness continued, and the voice of the speaker cried with undiminished vigour. Just as the captain was about to stop the engines, and allow the vessel to drift, they suddenly emerged into a clear atmosphere and a bright sky, with the sun shining as gloriously as before. The scene of gloom had changed for one of joy and brightness. And there was the adventurous speaker, standing boldly upon the poop of the vessel, with arms uplifted to heaven, calling down God's blessing upon the human mass beneath. The poor fellows had now found from whence the strange, unearthly sounds had proceeded, and were glad to find after all that the speaker was a man like themselves.

Ned had gained their attention—what should hinder his continuing? He knew well how to interest them. The story of his own life was sufficient to do that. It was not every day that they could hear how God had met with a notorious burglar and ill-liver. They were some distance from Holyhead. The captain did not complain. The men were still attentive. "I'll go on," thought Ned, "in dependence upon the good Spirit that has helped me thus far."

And he did go on, preaching, and exhorting, and entreating, until they arrived on shore. On landing, what a different scene was witnessed from that which had been apprehended! The crowd gathered round the speaker and his companion, not to threaten or abuse the evangelists, but to shake their hands, to thank them, and to hear a little more about the message of love and of mercy which had arrested their minds.

It was evident that the people which sat in darkness had seen a great light. Some poured out their thanks profusely ; others expressed their conviction that God had sent the darkness to relieve them from a still greater

darkness—the darkness of sin and death ; while others thanked God and His servant for the blessed tidings which that day had greeted their ears. One burly fellow wept like a child, and seizing Ned's hands, said to him, " Oh, sir, while you were quoting those beautiful texts in the thick fog light dawned upon my soul. My eyes are opened now. My soul was darker than the black fog ; but now I believe what you told us, that Jesus has paid the debt, and that He died for me ; and my heart rejoices in the good news, that the blood of Jesus Christ saves me from all sin."

Ned now returned with greater zeal than ever to his work in the New Cut, and resolved upon certain plans by which he might do more specific work among the thieves of the metropolis.

CHAPTER XI.

Ned's thieves' soup suppers.—The guests.—Their behaviour.—Ned's addresses.—Honest employment for thieves.—Female thieves.—Thieves' supper at Manchester.—Results.

NED despaired of securing a meeting of *bond-fide* thieves at a religious service by the methods ordinarily adopted to gather more reputable congregations. He had been accustomed to assist in various tea-meetings for special classes of persons, and these had been successful. But even a tea-meeting might fail to allure thieves, although tea and cake would present irresistible attractions to the females. It was wisely resolved, therefore, to commence a series of soup suppers, at which the privileged guests should consist of those who were convicted thieves. None but these were welcomed; for, as a writer in the *Times* said, "The best intentions and sincerest professions of larceny will avail the visitor nothing without this formal certificate of character and proficiency from a Justice of the Peace; and if, tempted for once into untruthfulness by the too savoury fumes of the pea-soup, the respectable visitor feels inclined to pretend that he is a convicted thief, I may as well warn him beforehand that his host will be more than a match for him. Ned Wright . . . has that intimate knowledge of gaol discipline and diet which only comes from a varied personal experience, and he talks the thieves' tongue like a native. In two minutes the pretended thief would be convicted of respectability, and sent away shamefaced and soupless."

To secure his grand field nights with these deplorable characters a number of helpers visited their haunts with cards of invitation, on which it was stated that no policeman would be allowed under any pretence to be present. Five hundred applications for tickets were received for the first night ; but accommodation could only be provided for two hundred. " In the result," says one newspaper report, " the guests of the evening were roughly analysed thus : There were 188 men and boys who had altogether served in prison 142 years, four months, and two weeks ; and there were seven men who had between them served sixty-seven years and four months ; or a total of 195 guests, who had undergone nearly 210 years of imprisonment. One of them had been convicted no less than sixteen times, and had served seven years ; against another thirteen convictions and ten years' imprisonment were on record ; and the degree of criminality gradually dwindled down from these extreme cases, until at the other end of the scale stood a boy of tender years who had been sent to prison for fourteen days for stealing four turnips when he was hungry. It was painful to see a juvenile already in the ranks of professional criminals."

It was hardly to be expected that pea-soup, however good, and suitable addresses, however telling, would attract many of the more skilful and better-to-do class of thieves. Many of the men who are recognized in low life as cracksmen (or burglars), and clyfakers (or genteel pickpockets), are, when possessed of money, as respectably attired and apparently as well conducted as a city clerk. " Snide-pitchers" (or bad money passers), " bluey-hunters," or " pigeon-flyers" (men who steal lead from the roofs of old buildings), and common " prigs," were the class of professional sinners who accepted the invitation to sup with Ned Wright. A few swell mobsmen and " opera jumpers" (men who dress in the highest style of fashion, and rob at theatres and opera-houses) were ex-

pected. For some of these men are occasionally "down in luck," and would not object to a basin of soup, although they are not accustomed, as their poorer brethren, to "a palmer's pint and three," which means a pint of indifferent coffee and three slices of bread. At the sixth supper many notorious thieves of this class were present, and the close-cropped, repulsive looking order of vagabonds, who are as hoarse as a costermonger, were in fewer numbers. At all of the gatherings the behaviour of the audience was good. The female thieves were at their own special meeting, placed apart from the males; but this did not cause any disturbance. One or two of the more forward indulged in chaffing observations, which were enjoyed by a few, but were regarded with but little favour by others. Ned himself was received with a round of hearty cheers, which were only interrupted by a few who strove frantically to be witty at his expense. Their good-humoured sallies were stopped when he got on the platform, and recommended his friends to "take in a cargo of pea-soup." Judging from their hungry looks, they seemed equal to such an engagement, and it was necessary that they should be warned in their avidity not to deal unfairly with each other. "You're going to have a clinking clump of tommy each," said Ned, talking the thieves' tongue, "and if you make your jaws ache now they'll be no use when you get the soup. Now, there's one piece of bread for each of you; and if any one sees his neighbour trying to take two you must round on him,"—that is, being interpreted, turn informer—"and I will see that he enjoys his supper outside." This order was responded to by appreciative cheers; and what would have been the effect of any disobedience it would be hard to say. And yet not very hard, if one may judge from the size of their unregenerate fists, and from the fact that Ned himself had to use a little physical persuasion forcibly to exclude some "smashers," whose

company had not been invited, and for whom no provision had been made.

The clamour during this part of the proceedings was, as might be expected, great, and the chaffing and shouting uproarious. The bread was eagerly seized, and quickly devoured, as though it were a luxury to their empty stomachs. With all their eagerness and keen appetites they were remarkably obedient, and not a little patient, as they sat on the rough forms awaiting their turn to be served. At last came the soup. Loud were the shouts of approval and of welcome as the first basin of soup, all steaming hot, was brought in by one of the waiters. A rush might have been expected, but it was not made. Some lingering sense of propriety, or a feeling of respect due to the host, or perhaps a fear of being put down by ridicule or physical force, kept the visitors in their seats. One wild-looking, bullet-headed fellow, who was inclined to be obstreperous, was silenced effectually when Ned, pointing to him, said, "If our friend in the white jacket were to do that in Wandsworth they'd know what to do with him, eh?"

"Three days' bread and water, sir," was the immediate response. And the company cheered, the gentlemen on the platform smiled, a few winked, and the offender appeared ashamed.

It is not always easy on such occasions to secure the attention of the guests after the meal. Some may wish to leave, and many excuses of an outrageously absurd description will be offered to avoid remaining to the short religious service. Others will persist in cracking jokes and indulging in horse-play. A strong hand may sometimes be needed to put an end to interruptions. But few displays of ill-temper have been witnessed at these peculiar gatherings. Having been one of their own class, they feel an interest in Ned; and are curious to know how he will speak, and what he will say. The proceedings were

commenced by the speaker asking them to take off their caps, which was promptly done, a small bare-headed boy in the gallery shouting out, "But suppose we ain't got none." This was evidently deemed an exceptional instance of poverty, for no reply was thought needed. Ned then commenced :—

"Now, men and boys, although I know you are a don't-care set of fellows, I want you to show you can do what I ask you to-night. Now, I suppose you're most of you out of work, and without any characters to lose; if not you've no business here, for this meeting's intended only for those who've got into trouble. Now, I dare say there are many of you who'd like to have a coster's barrow, with a stock of goods on it. Well, I've got something to say about that before I've done; but first I want you to sing a hymn with me."

A demand was here made for hymn-books—for the "Gospel Hall" has its own special penny hymn-book—but this was politely denied to the audience, on the significant ground that so many had "forgotten" to leave the book behind on a previous occasion. A hymn was then sung, more expressive of Ned's own experience than of the feelings of those who joined heartily, though not melodiously. Few hymns, indeed, could be suited to such a unique gathering. A short prayer followed, and then came the address.

Ned is an effective speaker, full of good points, and always vigorous. The few chapters he has learnt to read well he gives with considerable dramatic force. Few who have heard him read the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, or the story of the Prodigal Son, or the narrative of the Trial and Crucifixion of our Saviour, will readily forget the impressive and forcible style of the speaker. As to his discourse, the *Daily News* observes that at one of his soup suppers it was "half-speech, half-sermon, and in some respects neither one nor the other. Wright, though

essentially a street-preacher, and having many of the faults, and most of the characteristics of that class of orator, is still something more than a street-preacher."

"He can pray, and preach, and sing as if he were possessed. Out of the dark depths of his own experience he can point his moral and adorn his tale; and sometimes he does this with wonderful effect, as when illustrating the sufficiency of the Saviour, when bearing the punishment of our sins, he describes his own feelings, his agony, his remorse, his despair, when sent to gaol for three months for an offence of which he had not been guilty. Very few and simple are his ideas, but he seems to hold and utter them with titanic force. He clings firmly to the physical theory of another life; abstract truths, I fancy, have little charms for him. In theology he is the exact opposite of the sentimental mystic or the contemplative Hindoo. His theology is fearfully concrete, his heaven is to be taken by storm; outside there is the lion that seeketh whom he may devour; outside there is the burning flame and the bottomless pit; outside there is the worm that never dies, and the torment that knows no end. In a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—sudden as the lightning's flash, Christ comes to you, and you have passed from death unto life. You are now inside; for you there is the golden crown, and the shining robe, and the victor's palm; the joys of heaven and the melodious song of Moses and the Lamb. Christ follows you every step; there is no friend like Him. Well, this doctrine is Scriptural, but it may be stated extravagantly, and misunderstood by ignorance. As Wright sometimes states it, Huntingdon might have stated it. Once, as a lighterman, Wright told us he was in peril when going through a London bridge. Instead of trying to avert it he fell on his knees and besought the Lord Jesus, and Jesus came and guided the barge safely through. The writer has no wish to criticise any one harshly. The harvest to be

gathered is plenteous, and the reapers are few. The best of us can but poorly apprehend spiritual truth, and it is poor work stopping to quarrel about terms. And if Christ is thus to step in and save from danger, what are we to think when a good man loses his life by a railway accident, or when such a fearful catastrophe as that of the loss of the *London* occurs? Is it well to tell the least educated and the least reflective classes of the community that all things, temporal as well as spiritual, are wrought by faith in Christ and fervent prayer? . . . His mission appears to be to the roughest and rudest of our race—to men whom most would pass by as irreclaimable. Can these dry bones live? Yes, replies the testimony of Scripture, and the experience of the Christian Church. Of such was I one, says Wright. I was all that was infamous and bad. I committed crime after crime against man and God; and now I have found Christ, and will preach Him whenever and wherever I can—if not in the consecrated church, or to the men of intellect and culture, then by the roadside or in the humble schoolroom, to the companions of my sin and shame; to those whose poverty and crime would forbid their joining in a more regular worship. To the thief, to the harlot, to the public sinner, he seeks to preach Christ. His language is that to which they are accustomed; it is the Saxon of the rough and rude; his style and manner are the same. But all will see he is sincere—Christian in his life; and there are many in all parts of the country who will for ever have reason to rejoice that they went to hear Ned Wright.*

There does not seem to be any difficulty in securing the attendance of the class of persons invited to Wright's soup suppers. The only fear entertained by the thieves was lest any policeman should gain admittance to the hall. After the first supper the receivers of stolen goods, terrified lest "the hope of their gains" should be gone,

* *Christian World*, April 5th, 1867.

circulated a report that the police had apprehended two or three men who had been long looked for, and that Ned's only object in gathering them together was to afford facilities to the police to "spot" them. To "spot" a thief is to make him known to a brother detective. The helpers, however, assured the thieves upon whom they called that the reports were wholly false, and that no fear of the police need be entertained. Some believed, while many assailed the visitors as traitors, and threatened them with ill-treatment if they came again. However, in spite of this opposition, two hundred men and lads accepted the invitation, and attended the second supper. At the close of each service Ned requested all who desired to lead a new and honest life to call upon him on the following morning, when he would see what could be done for them. He soon found a larger number of cases than he could help. The most deserving men were therefore selected, and their immediate wants relieved. Employment was found for others, and help promised to those who could not then be assisted. Meanwhile ten thousand small bills were printed and circulated in the metropolis. The bill was as follows :—

" HONEST EMPLOYMENT FOR THIEVES.

" SIR,—Permit me to solicit your helping hand to temporarily rescue poor thieves from their miserable position, hundreds of whom are at this moment ready to work at carrying advertising boards in the streets, also delivering circulars, etc., etc., at a small return ; information of which may be obtained upon application to Edward Wright, New Cut Gospel Hall, 24, Lower Marsh, Lambeth, twenty-five doors from Westminster Road (see lamp over the door). Boards and men always in readiness.

" Every care will be taken to see that the work is done well.

“Letters of a private nature to be addressed to 20, Carlton Square, Pomeroy Street, Old Kent Road ; letters of business, to Gospel Hall, 24, Lower Marsh, Lambeth.

“N.B.—Some portion of the moneys earned will be thrown into a fund, out of which the deserving will be helped into a position where they can honestly help themselves.”

Orders soon came in for work, and the men gladly accepted the employment offered them. Some were engaged as bricklayers' labourers, others were put to general work requiring no special skill or technical knowledge, one man became a carman, and a lad was sent to sea ; but the majority were, as might have been expected, put only to casual work. The men showed a strong disposition to help one another, and this presented an example, as Ned well says, to many an honest man who had not lost his character. Two men, who were happily in employment, lived themselves upon twelve shillings a week each, and contributed seven shillings a week each towards the support of those who had been less fortunate than themselves ! This was noble generosity, which spoke well of the genuineness of their moral reformation. One great preliminary object which Ned had in view was to prevent any who were desirous of retrieving their characters returning to their old haunts. Some, too, were homeless ; and before anything could be done for them it was necessary to provide them with a temporary lodging. The only available place was the green-room of the “Gospel Hall,” *viz* “Penny Gaff.” This room was in a very dilapidated state ; but some of the thieves who understood a little of carpentering and bricklaying at once set to work, and in a short time the apartment was made fairly comfortable, and five men were at once lodged there out of the twenty who made application. As these men found employment they hired lodgings elsewhere, and thus made

way for others who were destitute. This method of rescuing men from their dishonest career has thus far been eminently successful; although it is Mr. Wright's prayer and hope that a new building may be erected, in which thieves may be lodged until they attain a respectable position in life. Trucks of an improved construction, with trays, etc., for light goods are now being built, and a portable Bible carriage has been put into service in the metropolis, that portions of the Word of God may be circulated, at the lowest possible price, among the poorest classes. A similar Bible barrow, with a pony, is also employed in circulating religious literature in the villages.

The meeting for female thieves deserves special mention, and the following description from the *Daily News* will afford the best idea of the character of that unique gathering: "Although the countenances of one or two of the male thieves in the gallery seemed to indicate recollections of the crank, and to suggest possibilities of the lash, they behaved upon the whole very quietly and orderly. Once or twice while Wright was speaking he felt it necessary to call them to order, and at last he asked some of 'our navy brethren' to go and sit among them. We are ignorant of the exact authority enjoyed or exercised by a 'navy brother,' but their presence in the gallery was sufficient to procure complete silence among its occupants, and Ned had no further occasion to rebuke them. The women, who, as we have said, numbered about seventy, were of all ages, from sixteen to sixty, or probably more. Babies—and one there was so wizened and so wan, so small of size, and so pinched of feature, that it seemed not like the offspring of a human mother, although all trace of humanity was not yet beaten out of the features of the thin pale girl who held it in her arms, but rather like a juvenile ape or monkey which by some freak of nature had approached more than ordinarily close to a resemblance to mankind—we do not include in this

calculation. All the women and girls were, to judge from their appearance, thieves of the meanest and most miserable kind. There was no show of success or pride, or even bravado, about them. They did not include among their number a single specimen of the gentle-mannered, elegantly-clad 'lady' who filches a purse in an omnibus, or whips a roll of costly lace from a counter, or of the stalwart, flaunting, audacious 'blowen' who holds a foolish 'fast' man with her arms while her pal knocks him on the head and rifles his pockets of his watch and valuables. All had the appearance of petty paltry pilferers, and pilferers with whom pilfering had gone very hard, and to whom it had brought few gains, many punishments, and much suffering. With the exception of two or three girls on one of the front benches, who wore bright wraps round their necks, and showy feathers in their jaunty hats, the clothes of all were mean, and poor, and scanty; their faces were pinched and drawn by want and hunger, and their manner was watchful, timid, and cowed. Of the few girls who looked better fed and better clothed, who still retained some of the freshness of girlhood, and some of the daring mirth of youth and innocence, two or three were afflicted with racking coughs that shook them at times from head to foot, which told a sad tale of constant exposure to wind, and rain, and storm, and threatened in unmistakable tones a speedy termination of their miserable careers. The supper which was provided consisted of large bowls of strong pea-soup, replenishable at the will of the consumer, and huge lumps of good wholesome bread. The girls in the front places did not appear greatly to relish their entertainment. They laughed loudly, almost contemptuously, among themselves when the huge bowls of streaming soup were presented to them; and although they ultimately stowed away the 'toke' in pockets or shawls, they hardly touched the steaming liquid. Not so their older and more experienced fellow-

criminals. With them the pangs of hunger were sharper, the doubts as to to-morrow's meal evidently more serious. Soup and bread disappeared with equal rapidity, and more than one poor woman asked for and received another and yet another allowance. The eagerness of their appetites seemed to increase with their advance in years, and the old nursery maxim that 'the eldest should have the most' was strictly, though unintentionally, carried into practice."

A thieves' supper was given in Manchester, in May, 1870. At this thieves' supper Ned gave the story of his conversion, and preached Jesus Christ, and many were touched to the heart. A letter of Mr. Birch's in a local paper mentions eleven cases of persons who were present that night to whom good was done. One was a lad, a convicted thief, influenced by circumstances to evil, but not hardened in crime; he is now at work, and likely to prove a faithful servant. "Another, a strong and well-built man, who has been convicted eight times, and has twice suffered penal servitude, told me he had tried hard for work, but no one would have him on account of his previous history. I obtained for him a promise of work, and it was understood that on presenting a letter from me he would be employed. He was out of bed at 4.30 a.m., and told me afterwards that it was the happiest moment of his life. He had now the prospect of being a respectable man, and he knelt to thank God for this blessing. Long before the time he was at the gates; but some of the workpeople knew him, and the poor fellow returned with the following note from the manager: 'Your note came to hand per bearer this morning—he was here before six o'clock; but I am sorry to say he is known, and it would not do, therefore, for him to work here. In order that a man may have a fair chance of living honestly and uprightly after 'servitude' he should be among strangers. I am exceedingly sorry for this man. God help him.' There is no help for it, it would seem. The only course

open to such a man is emigration, although Mr. Wright thinks that such men may do better in the old country, because they require to be kept in hand, and under the influence of some visible authority."

Another man, who was willing to work at any honest employment, was a strong young fellow, who had followed the trade of a burglar. His mother was a good woman, as not a few thieves' mothers are, but he was led into crime through evil associates. He has been frequently in gaol, and has found the way of transgressors to be hard. "A few weeks ago," writes Mr. Birch, "out of the proceeds of a burglary he bought a pair of trousers for 8s. 6d.; but he said, 'I got the money crooked,* and it did me no good. It's always the same. The money we get does us no good at all. I was starving the next week, and sold them for 4s., and bought these things I have on for one shilling. To get food and lodging I must now sell my boots, unless I can get work. I will not *go out* again.'"

Other men have long sought for opportunities of beginning again the battle of life, but have not found any. "There is no one knows," said one poor wretched fellow, "how hard it is to fight the uphill fight, to repair the character when once it is gone." Two others were men of superior education. One had been in gaol three and the other four times, the latter having associated with thieves and vagabonds in all parts of the country. He says: "I have tried to pray to God, but my heart cannot. Oh, how wretched I am! I have gone to such an extent that my friends will not look at me, and I am an outcast in the world. I can go to no one for advice, except old companions, and you know what theirs will be. I have walked about the streets two nights rather than go back amongst them, and have had nothing to eat for two days except the bits of bread I have been glad to pick up out of the streets. Alas! what must I do? No money, no

* Dishonestly.

friends, no work, no character ! Who would even allow me on their premises ? O God, suffer me not to fall back into my life of crime. My first situation was with —, where I had always a pound or two in hand for payment of foreign letters, and even then I began to pilfer, but was not found out. Oh, how tired I feel of my past life and what a terror comes over me when I think of it, and death ! I cannot give you my address, as I have not got one at present, but I will endeavour to get a lodging this afternoon, although, no doubt, it will be difficult, as I have no work, and no money, and no prospect of honestly obtaining any. God forbid that I should again do so dishonestly."

CHAPTER XII.

The boys of London.—William H——'s bad training.—The boy criminal.—A companion of blacklegs.—The reformed lad.—Tom the shoeblack.

ALL the education which many a boy living in the metropolis gets is that obtained from the streets. Thousands of little fellows practically live in the streets year after year, and are sent out to hawk "cigar lights," to sweep crossings, or to sell newspapers. They rarely get a substantial meal, and before they can eat any of the scraps they buy so cheaply at common cook chops they must earn the coppers with which to purchase them. Not a few dwell with their parents, cooped up in a pigeon-hole sort of garret, with perhaps half a dozen brothers and sisters, and are ill-treated if at the end of the day they return home without having disposed of all their little stock-in-trade. Their natural love of play induces them to dispose as quickly as possible of their goods, or to realize—honestly or not is soon with them a matter of indifference—an average sum of money, that some of the hours of the day, or all the hours of the evening, may be spent in boyish amusements. Their love of gambling, and the dexterity with which they cheat each other, combined with a passion, which in some is uncontrollable, to gain money, and in others to spend it, gives them a taste for dishonest tricks which eventually brings them to prison and to disgrace.

William H—— was one of this numerous class of boys who are sent from home to earn their livelihood when they ought to be in an elementary school. When a young

man he was employed to carry deals in the docks ; but the evil lessons he had learnt as a child in the streets had prepared him for a life of crime. He combined with others to plunder systematically his employers. This was done by loading the waggons with more wood than the order required, or the invoice specified. The extra quantities were disposed of, and the money spent in drink. At last they grew so bold in their robberies as to be suspected ; no direct proof, however, could be brought against any one of them, or they would have been prosecuted. But they were discharged, and William H—— had to bear his share of the punishment he deserved in being out of employment for nearly twelve months. During this time he wandered the streets, failing to find work, and was brought into the direst poverty. Starvation at last staring him in the face, he resorted to petty acts of pilfering, but avoided detection. A good opportunity was afforded him to retrieve his lost character when he obtained work on the Midland Railway works, which were then in course of construction. He was removed from his old associates ; and if his wages were low, they might have sufficed to maintain himself and wife comfortably. Unfortunately, in spite of better intentions, he became involved in difficulties, and resolved in an evil hour to abstract a cashbox from one of the wooden sheds on the line. He gained admittance into the shed by means of a crowbar one evening, at nine o'clock, and stole seventeen shillings in postage stamps and thirty shillings in silver. The robbery did not occupy more than two or three minutes, and he left, as he had entered, unobserved. Soon after gaining the main road he encountered, near a public-house, the watchman of the works, who saluted him with "Good night, William ; why, ain't you home yet ?" "No," was the reply ; "I'm just off." In order to prevent suspicion he deemed it prudent to call at the public-house, so that he might be

able to say that the watchman could not have seen him, since he was at the time drinking at the bar. He therefore went inside, called for liquor, and just as he was leaving he met a policeman at the door. "Hallo, William," said he, "what brings you here at this time of night?" For a moment the guilty man was confused, but at length replied, "Oh, I've not been home yet since I left work." "Nonsense," said the officer; "why, I saw you go home with the other men." "Oh, no," was the audacious reply, "you must be mistaken; why I've been drinking here all the evening. Will you have a pint? I'll go and fetch it; but you see I've had plenty myself." Upon saying this he hurried to the bar, called for a pint, and threw down a shilling for payment. "Oh," said the landlord, "you're well up to-night, William, ain't you? It's well to be you. Why, this is the third shilling that you've changed to-night, and you've only had three pints of beer. Suppose you give me coppers; for I'm rather short of change." The policeman overheard the landlord; and when William went to him, and proffered the beer, he said to him, as he placed his hand upon his shoulder, "Oh, never mind the liquor now; I shall apprehend you, for I am satisfied there's something wrong, since I know all about your previous character, and did so long before you came here." At this moment the landlord came to the door, and addressing the policeman, begged him not to run away with one of his customers, as he had only been at the bar a quarter of an hour. This still further increased the constable's suspicions, and William was taken to the station-house, where the stamps and some of the money that had been stolen were found upon him, and at his trial he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labour.

All his prospects in life were now blighted, and, as he felt, his character was irretrievably lost. His industrious wife, who had laboured hard to maintain him and the

family while he was out of work, felt degraded. She regarded it as a great calamity to be the wife of a convicted thief, and could hardly bring herself to believe her husband guilty. When he left prison, and again came to London, she besought him to promise not again to transgress, and he resolved to lead in the future a more honest life. He was, however, soon after ensnared by a receiver of stolen goods, and resorted to his old haunts, spending his days in drunkenness and thieving. Like many others of this class, all was not sunshine with him, and the money he gained dishonestly he spent so readily that at times he was reduced almost to starvation. The heartlessness of some of his small acts of robbery was cruel. He even stole some of the garments of the poor persons who lived in the same house in which he lodged, and sold them for one-tenth of their value.

Fortunately he was induced to attend the second of Ned's soup suppers. "During the evening," says Ned, "I noticed that he seemed greatly impressed by what he was hearing; and when the meeting and supper were over one of the friends called me to him, when I found him deeply concerned about his soul. I put the gospel before him simply, and he left the place completely overwhelmed. I had invited those who were desirous of changing their course of life to come and see me the next day, and he was one of those who came. I gave him a little present help, and having taken down his address, I visited him in his own home. I found his wife hard at work, making small baskets, and three or four children were round her, all huddled together in one miserably furnished room. They seemed to be in the most abject state of poverty. I spoke to the wife concerning her husband, when she said he was a great trial to her, that they would all starve were it not for her own industry, and that she had to work very hard to get bread enough for the children; but she would not mind that if he would only be kind

to her ; for his temper was almost too much for any one to bear. I asked her what she thought as to his soul, when she replied that since the previous night he had been in a most wretched state of mind, but he had not been so cross with her ; he only seemed wild with himself, as if he hated himself. I learned that he was labouring under conviction of sin. I was enabled to help her with a little money for their immediate wants, for which she expressed her gratitude, and after commending the family to the Lord in prayer I left, promising to use my best endeavours to obtain some employment for her poor husband."

At the next soup supper he was also present, and it was on that occasion he found relief to his soul. With a heart full of joy he ran home, and embracing his wife, told her that the Lord had that night saved his soul, and that, although he had been a bad man and a cruel husband, he meant, in dependence upon God's Spirit, to act differently. The next morning his eldest daughter, who was about nine years of age, asked her mother, "What is the matter with father this morning? he speaks so kind to me, and he never did so before."

"Oh, nothing, my child," was the mother's reply.

"Ah, but I know there is," persisted the little girl ; "he was never like this before. Oh, mother, is father going to die? for he has been crying and reading the Bible, and he's never done that before."

"No," answered the mother ; "your father is not going to die ; he is going always to be kind now ; for he means to love Jesus, and go to chapel."

"Oh!" cried the little one, joyfully, "won't that be nice ; for then I know he'll take me to chapel ; and I want to love Jesus too."

The next Sabbath he attended the house of God, with his eldest child, and joined the Bible-class in the afternoon. Employment was ultimately found for him, although at small wages. His wife is now a consistent

Christian, and the family is as distinguished for its happiness as once it was for its misery.

F— A—, as in the preceding case, received nearly all his education in the streets when a child. He was brought up in a western city. His father was a good tradesman, but of grossly intemperate habits, and his mother strove hard to provide sufficient food for her children. At eight years of age F— had to go out to work, and he soon associated himself with a gang of rough lads who trained him for a criminal life. As an errand-boy at a grocer's shop, belonging to one of his father's boon companions, he was noted for his sharpness, and soon he was put behind the counter. Here he began to steal, sometimes robbing his employer to the amount of thirty shillings a week, his unsuspecting mistress blaming her husband for taking the money from the till with which to procure more drink. F—, however, was not content with these thefts, nor with the quiet life he then led. To be compelled to serve behind a counter, though an employment for which he was well fitted by natural gifts, was irksome to a lad who loved to roam about the streets. After a few months he was determined to be released from his confinement; and leaving the shop, he joined a gang of young thieves in the city, and went into training for house-breaking. They could go out at night, and practise upon several houses, learning how to open doors and windows without making a noise, sometimes stealing from the halls and passages a few articles, but rarely entering the houses at all. Their doings ultimately attracted the notice of the police, who suspected them of stealing as well as merely opening the doors of the houses.

He was sickened of the influences and society of bad companions, and resolved at once to remove to the metropolis, and labour honestly for the future. This he did, gaining respectable employment and excellent wages. For a season he prospered, but was suspended for one

month for insubordination. During this time he was tempted once again to steal, and longing for some more money to add to the little store he had managed to save through his industrious care, he resolved that evening to pick some one's pockets. Evening, however, did not come before he fell ill of the small-pox, from which he suffered so severely as to be blind for several days, and unable to resume work for eight weeks. Although he was but poorly acquainted with scriptural truth, he knew that God's omniscient eye had been upon him, watching his career, and that He discerned all his evil thoughts. He remembered some of his mother's wise admonitions, and the recollection made him feel very uncomfortable. On his return to work a city missionary began, and carried on at stated times, a religious service among those men who could not, or would not, or from various causes did not, attend the house of God on the Sabbath. F—— went to this simple service, and his attention was arrested by the reading of the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins. He felt self-condemned. His conduct had been through life foolish, and his end, he feared, would be as sad as that of the virgins whose lamps had gone out. The words of Jesus Christ sank into his heart, "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh." The parable forced upon him the duty of self-examination, and as the result he was greatly troubled. He now determined to think more of the needs of his undying spirit; and as he had never been to either church or chapel he felt a disinclination to begin to attend a place of worship; so he resolved to listen to some of the many street preachers who take their stand in various parts of South London, and accordingly he listened night after night to some of the men connected with the Gospel Hall; and hearing from one of these speakers that "Ned Wright" was to preach on the following Sunday evening, he made up his mind to

hear what Ned had to say. He did so, and his feelings, while listening to the preacher's story of his life, and exhortations to his hearers, were such as led him to believe that his past career was known to him. In his simplicity he concluded that God had communicated to the people around him all the particulars of his life. The preacher's testimony was the means of F—'s conversion; and for four years he has had cause to bless God for the mercy extended him that evening. Like most of the labouring men who have been saved through the word preached by Ned Wright, he began soon to attempt some work for God. He frequently spoke about the love of God to sinful humanity, and it is still his delight to tell the story of the Cross to his fellow-workmen. Nor have his humble efforts been fruitless. The second foreman on the works was brought to the meetings by his persuasions, and F—'s heart was delighted to find that he too had become a partaker of Divine grace. And among the men on the works F— is still known as an earnest, simple-hearted, God-fearing man, whose daily life illustrates the lessons which often flow from his lips.

E— P— was the son of respectable parents, his mother having had £15,000 left her on her parent's death. Her first husband was a dissolute character, and spent her money. At his decease she was compelled to seek a situation in a large metropolitan hospital, and while here she was married to one of the surgeons, the father of the subject of our present sketch. E—, however, lost his father when seven years of age, and was sent to the pauper's school at Lewisham, where he remained until he was eleven years old. With a few other lads of about his own age he got into an orchard, and stole some fruit. For this he was to have been corrected, but he escaped from the school, and walked to London, calling upon his mother, who was cook in a family in Newington. He was taken back to school, but the master refusing to

admit him, his mother found him a situation as doctor's boy. His early life was a series of mishaps. He accidentally broke one or two of the panes while cleaning the doctor's windows, and was discharged. He dropped a pie-dish when taking it to the bakehouse, and his employer, a blind-maker, angry at losing his batter-pudding, dismissed him his service. He was accused falsely of stealing half-a-crown at another place, and was once again thrown upon the world. He was then apprenticed to a shoemaker for seven years. After two years' service had expired, his employer, deeming him to be trustworthy, sent him to purchase leather. This was indiscreet, and the young shoemaker, who only had an allowance of threepence per week as pocket-money, soon found the opportunity to cheat too favourable to resist. He began to buy an inferior article, at threepence per pound cheaper than he was told to pay, and at last his misdeeds were discovered by his master, who would have prosecuted him had he not otherwise been a good servant.

Some time after this he was put in prison for using a knife with intent to do grievous bodily harm. It appears that a quarrel arose between himself and a fellow-apprentice who had the misfortune to be near-sighted. The latter, in the heat of passion, raised his hand to strike E—— a blow on the head, but did not see a knife that was in E——'s hand. When E—— saw the hand about to fall he up-raised his own to guard himself, when the knife entered his assailant's arm above the elbow, making a severe gash, and opening one of the arteries. E—— remained at Newgate nearly six weeks awaiting his trial; but the grand jury ignored the bill.

When he attained the age of manhood E—— earned good wages; but, alas! spent all he earned at the concert-room and theatre, and in gay amusements. Being a good singer, his company was much sought after by the frequenters of music-halls and public-houses. He spent

his Sunday evenings at the Eagle, surrounded by his pot companions who admired him, and his money not less. Often would he spend thirty shillings on one of these evenings in drink and in treating his flatterers.

It was thought that his marriage would be the means of his reformation, but as his wife was fond of amusements too, he still continued in his wild career. His friends set him up in business, which proved to be lucrative; but, as before, all his gains were misspent. Business became neglected, the trade fell off, and he was greatly reduced in circumstances. After a time he returned to shoemaking, and chose for his evening companions the men who are known as "blacklegs," many of whom were thieves. His wife set up a receiving house, and purchased of her husband's companions the goods which she well knew, because they confessed it, were stolen. The police suspected some of these men, and E—— was persuaded to become a spy. He was therefore engaged to purchase goods of the thieves, and hand them over to the detectives, in order that they might compare them with other goods, and thus get a clue to the real offenders. One night there was a great jewel robbery to the amount of £13,000. Rightly or wrongly it was believed that E—— knew who were the guilty parties, and that he was afraid to divulge the secret for fear of being murdered. On one occasion he bought a waggon-load of leather, and was introduced into a "thieves' garret;" for, good reader, the most successful thieves are the least happy, and live mostly in the deepest obscurity. Here he saw at the top of a house, in a room, an entrance to which had to be gained by means of a ladder and a trap-door, the home of a gang of notorious burglars, who could find no securer place than this to hoard their ill-gotten gains. E—— purchased the whole of the leather they had stolen, and worked it away by degrees, selling it in small quantities very cheaply, but succeeding in making a large profit out of the bargain.

Cards, gambling, drinking, and other vices were followed greedily at this time, and E—— began to be known in the neighbourhood in which he lived as a confirmed drunkard and notorious blackguard. He was also a great scoffer at all holy things, and the deeper he descended into sin the stronger were the words which he employed everywhere to express his detestation of religion. At last, however, he lost a child of which he was very fond, and this loss was followed by other family bereavements. His wife's sister, who was a member of a Christian church, died, and E—— had to attend the funeral service. The minister's discourse deeply affected him, and, determined to change his life, he became a total abstainer from alcoholic drinks. It was a good resolution; but while the heart remained unchanged there was little hope for a radical reformation of the conduct. He commenced again to rail at religion, and, like many other cowardly enemies of the saints of God, he persecuted those whose purity and godliness were a protest against his own sinful life. That which he could not understand he blasphemed; and those who sought to bring him into his right mind were scouted as fools and intermeddlers with his peace.

One day, while in a state of deep poverty, he was seized with typhus fever. Friends, however, were kind; and when he became convalescent they removed him to one of the bye-streets in the Blackfriars Road. In the removal, however, a relapse occurred, and his life was despaired of. While in this condition he was visited by two Bible-women, who endeavoured to arouse him to a sense of his condition as a sinner. His feeling, however, was that he had not done harm to any one but himself, and that all through life he had only been his own enemy. When he recovered his sickness he was invited to a tea-meeting for the poor of the district, and he and his wife accepted the invitation. Both husband and wife were convinced that night of their need of the Divine forgive-

ness, and they realized its power. This occurred nearly five years ago ; and now E— is one of the most active and useful men who, in connection with Ned Wright's work, labour to bring souls to the Saviour.

E— may be heard preaching nearly every Sabbath evening in the New Cut, both indoors and in the open thoroughfare.

Among the many young lads who attended the thieves' suppers was one who manifested intense anxiety to change his mode of life. He confessed he had been "a very bad and wicked boy," had been convicted of stealing in the city of Bath, and was imprisoned there for some time. After his release he tramped to London in search of employment. In this he failed, and therefore applied to Mr. Wright for help. A benevolent friend in Folkestone had applied to Ned for a convicted thief desirous of reforming his life, to work in the coal trade, and this lad was sent, and his services accepted. He is now likely to become an honest and industrious young man ; and his life has hitherto well tested his sincerity. Two days after his departure the following letter was received from him :—

"DEAR SIR,

"I now take my pen in hand to write these few lines to you, hoping you are quite well, as it leaves me at present, and i had a very pleasent journey and Mister G— met me at the stasion safely, and he is a very nice gentleman and he took me to Miss A—, she is a very nice lady to , and I thinke folkstone is a very nice place and the vessell wich I am goen a board is at bolougne, and I am goen thear this evening Monday 18th and I shall very often come to folkestone and I am very thankful that I have such great friends to com and see when I com a-shorè and I don't no how to thank you a nuff for your grate kindness to me and I will promise to keep a

way from public houses, and i'll trust in the Lord to help me through all my little difekeltys and dear Mr. Wright

"You must forgive me for riten so bad, for I have had no schooling and give my love to all the young men at the hall, and I am very happy now and i hop i shall get on nice and comf bull and i will keep a way from bad company, so i hav no more to say at present and I will send a nother letter when I get on bord, as soon as possible, so good-bye for the present.

"from your

"Affectonet friend,

"A—— G——."

In a subsequent letter, addressed to a lady at Folkestone, who received him previous to his going on board ship, he writes : "I have a very good captain, and he is very kind, and he is one I can get on with very well indeed ; and I thank you very much for your kindness to me. I don't know how to thank you enough for your kindness, but I will try to do my best while I am here, and I think I shall get on very well indeed."

Tom ——, a shoeblack of the New Cut, was one of the most desperat of the young lads who infest the neighbourhood. From his earliest years he seemed to delight in mischief, and was determined to live a dishonest, vagabond life. He was well known to the police in the district as an expert young gambler, and as a consequence he received no favour from them. His favourite game was "pitch-and-toss," in which he indulged in the street when the police were out of sight, with his blacking-box by his side, which served as a "stall," or disguise. His language, as a swearer and blasphemer, was only equalled by those who had acquired greater proficiency in blackguardism. This habit became so great upon him that he could not utter a sentence without either an oath or the

use of some filthy expression. In the evening he was always to be found patronizing a low theatre, and on the Sabbath he did little else but gamble, seeking for all the "flats" within a given radius. He manifested a malicious pleasure in annoying the open-air preachers, and taxed his ingenuity to the utmost in scoffing at religion. If a prize had been offered to the worst lad in Lambeth, Tom would probably have been the successful competitor. His mother, however, was determined to rescue him from the streets, and to put him to some trade. This was the first step towards reformation. He found honourable employment to ward off many a temptation, and to him it was a new experience to have his mind set a-thinking by hard work. Working at the bench by his side was a young lad of quite a different character—quiet, shy, unassuming, and meditative. He was never known to join in the blasphemies of other lads; he always refused to drink with the workmen, and was noted for his love of industry. He was a Christian! That was enough of itself to secure the dislike of the ungodly workmen in the shop; but their hatred of him was increased all the more when they found the foreman honourably approve of his conduct and attention to work. It was thought that nothing would annoy the consistent lad more than impure language, and Tom was urged to vex his righteous soul as much as possible in this way. Tom was very proud thus to show off his diabolic skill, and sought incessantly to arouse the temper of the young man. Greatly to his surprise and disappointment, however, every art and provoking allusion failed, and Tom was compelled eventually to give up assailing him. One day it happened that Tom was in difficulty about his work, and although the workmen knew well enough how to help him out of it, they declined to render him any assistance or offer him any suggestion. Not so the persecuted lad, who volunteered his help; and when Tom had conquered the difficulty, he

was quietly invited to come at any time for "a lift." Tom was staggered, and became speechless, and so unable to thank, as he would have done, his unexpected friend. While looking at his friend with a wondering stare a hand was laid on Tom's shoulder, and the young man said, "I have hope in you yet ; for I have prayed very much for you."

"Prayed for me ! prayed *very much* for me !" thought the astonished Tom, "why, what does he mean ?" Though he went about his work heartily, and set about his amusements in the evening, yet the words would ring in his ears, "Prayed very much for me." The plane in his hand seemed burdened with the same words, as he used it, and the saw seemed to echo the same mysterious language. Whenever he attempted to swear, or to use foul speech, he was gagged as he thought of the words, "I have hope in you yet ; for I have prayed very much for you."

The young Christian observed with joy that Tom did not swear at or otherwise annoy him, and he hoped that the words he had said to him had touched a secret chord in his heart. In vain did his cowardly companions now urge him to assault his new friend.

"Give him a peal, Tom," said an old man, as he passed Tom's bench.

"What for ?" asked Tom ; "he never annoys me."

"Oh," said the other, "he's a religious bloke, he is. Why, he ought to be burnt, and all such sanctimonious —. I'd burn them all, if I only had my way with the crawlers."

"I'll tell you what," was Tom's sharp, bluff reply, "he's the quietest young chap that we've got, and the civilest too : so you may say what you like ; but I won't abuse him any more, and I think you had better let the man alone."

"Bravo ! Tom," exclaimed a voice by his side. Turning round, Tom encountered the foreman, with an ap-

proving smile on his countenance. "Bravo, Tom! I am right down glad to hear you say so. I wish you were all like him. Why, I shouldn't have half the trouble I have if you all were; well, well, I've hope of you yet, Tom. To tell you the truth, I had thoughts a day or two ago of getting rid of you, as an incorrigible fellow, but now I have some hopes of you." And with this the foreman moved on.

"Thanks," said Tom; "but you've not done for me what he has done—'prayed very much for me.'"

The foreman had passed out of hearing; but the object of his remarks observed in a quiet tone, "Praise the Lord, I do, Tom."

"Well," said he, "I don't know why you should; for I've been a regular torment to you ever since I came here; but I'm very sorry for it, and promise that I'll never do it again, and so I hope you'll forgive me, though I have been so bad to you."

"I forgive you," was the quick response, "though you must ask God's forgiveness, and you cannot do that unless you know Him; but if you come to Jesus, God will forgive you for His sake."

This struck Tom as strangely mysterious. "Don't know Jesus," he replied. "Come to Jesus! how can I come to Jesus? He won't have anything to do with me! It's only good folks that go to church or chapel."

"But," said the other, "God loves you."

"No He doesn't," said Tom, respectfully. "He only loves good folks."

"Ah, no, Tom," said the Christian workman; "it was not the righteous, good folks, but sinners that Jesus came to save."

Tom's curiosity was aroused. He began to think soberly about all that had passed. He longed for the dinner-hour to arrive, when he could talk a little more with his friend.

True friends indeed did they become. Tom learnt now the way of salvation, and was interested for the first time in religious truth. On the Sunday he was taken to the once despised "Gospel Hall" to hear Ned Wright. That night became the most remarkable night in his history. Bitterly did he weep as he felt deep penitence for sin; joyously did he sing when he found all his sins forgiven. He went home praising God.

But he went home to ungodly relatives. Neither mother nor father loved or feared God, and his younger brothers were neglectful, while the eldest of them all was a lover of every vice. But he did not hesitate to tell them of his conversion, and on retiring to rest he prayed, as well as he could, for the salvation of the whole household. Somehow, though he did not place any merit in his prayers, or believe in the efficacy of any of his words to his parents, he felt convinced that his brethren would be saved. On the Monday morning he went to the workshop, with the intention of maintaining silence about the great change, lest he should not be able to brook the persecution which would be inevitable if he openly avowed that he was a Christian. But, to use a Bunyan phrase, "as God would have it," one of the workmen, who happened to be present at the service on the previous evening, cried out, "Oh, here comes one of —'s pupils."

"No," said Tom, "not —'s pupils, but one of Jesus Christ's pupils, I trust;" and before all the workmen he boldly confessed that Jesus was his Lord.

His after conduct abundantly proved the sincerity of Tom's professions, and his earnestness won respect. At this time he could not read. Hundreds of Christians amongst the lowest classes are not able to read a chapter in the New Testament when first converted to God; but one of their earliest efforts after conversion is to secure instruction in the spelling-book. It was so with poor

Tom. With perseverance he soon succeeded in his task, and was able to read his much-loved Testament. Having received some further instruction, he was requested one evening to tell the story of his conversion to a number of poor people in the hall. He did so, and Mr. Wright has since met with not a few who were "savourily convinced of the truth as it is in Jesus" that evening. On another occasion his father and mother were in the hall, and seeing them present he made a personal and affectionate appeal to them, which God was pleased to bless to their conversion. Tom has now the joy of knowing that his prayers have been answered, for all the household are now serving the Lord.

CHAPTER XIII.

Cases of usefulness.—A drunken blasphemer.—A backslider rescued.—No "education."—Letters from converts.

OUT of the very large number of letters received by Mr. Wright from persons who have been brought to the Saviour by his ministry we propose now to make a selection. In some cases we retain the original orthography. In every instance care has been taken only to publish the letters of those who are now leading a consistent life.

The following epistle is from a very warm-hearted believer :—

October, 1864.

"DEAR FRIENDS,—

"i have bean one of the wust of Drunking Blasthemer and i neither fearing God or man, but got stoped one night, and goin long Dockhead wen i heard Nead Rite teling what God had done for his soul, and ther for the first time in my life i knew that i was a sinner, and from there God led me into a room and there i heard that gospel Preched and heard that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin and there i felt i was a sinner in the site of God ; from that i was lead to the place called calvery and there i found Jesus bearing my sins on the cross. Then i prased God for his goodness towards a Rech like me. Dear Friends i can praise God now Becase god saved poor man poor Drunking man like me, and from that time i praid for my wife for the saving of her soul and God hear

and answer my prayers and i also praied for my mothers soul answerd my prayer and now we can prais him togear, and now we are all pilgrims on our way to God and i can say I see Jesus for He Revel him self to me and now i can say precious Jesus precious Jesus precious Jesus thou art all in all to me

“yes i have been very happy ever since.

“R——W——.”

The following is a letter from a backslider who lived for some years in sin :

“DEAR BROTHER,—

“I was converted at an early age, having been brought up in the fear of the Lord. I had the advantage of pious parents, was a Sunday scholar, and afterwards a teacher in the Baptist chapel at Cardiff, and, when a young man, played the clarinet in the singing ; but subsequently I went to sea, and soon went into the depths of sin and degradation. I became a drunken blasphemer, a noted fighter, and one of the worst characters in the ship (except being dishonest).

“Miserable in my soul, I stifled my conscience with the drunkard’s cup—even to giving up all thoughts of God ; and in one of my maddened hours I offered to sell myself to the devil, that I might get money to rid myself from the man-of-war, and enjoy the unrestrained pleasures of this world.

“For years I continued in this state, until about two years ago I was working at a shipbuilding yard at Greenwich, when one Sunday night, in Deptford Broadway, I stopped to listen to a young man preaching ; and when he was done he announced that a converted burglar would tell how he was captured, at the Deptford Theatre, at seven o’clock that night. I followed the crowd, as they sung, down to the theatre, and I went in, and there heard Ned Wright.

“ During the address Mr. Wright asked a little girl that was near him on the stage if she was afraid to die, and the child said ‘ No, ’ for Jesus died for her.

“ Mr. Wright then addressed the mothers, and urged them to pray for their children, for this child had been saved by a mother’s prayers ; and then addressing sinners, he spoke of some there who had praying mothers. I thought of my mother’s prayers for me—conviction seized hold of me, all my sins arose before me ; I was miserable. I saw my position before God. I left the theatre a changed man. I resolved to give up the drink from that hour, to leave off swearing and blaspheming, and to turn over a new leaf. Although happily for me I kept these resolutions, yet I could not find peace for my soul. I was wont to say, and that very often, ‘ Ned Wright was a great sinner, but I am a great deal worse than he.’

“ During November, 1869, I removed to Lambeth, and one night I said to my wife, ‘ Next Sunday night I will go to some place of worship.’ Accordingly on the night in question I strolled into Surrey Chapel ; but observing the minister (the Rev. Newman Hall) ascend the pulpit in a white surplice, and commence reading the prayers, I thought it was the Church of England, and so took up my hat, and walked out, and went up the New Cut.

“ When I got to No. 15 I observed a lighted lamp, with the words ‘ Gospel Hall,’ ‘ God is love,’ ‘ What think ye of Christ?’ upon it ; so I thought I would go in here for a little ; and when I got in I was surprised to find my old friend Ned Wright. I resolved to attend this place regularly, and on the third Sunday night I observed on the wall a large paper text with the words ‘ Have faith in God ’ upon it. This was a message from God to my soul ; it was a nail driven in by the Master of assemblies. I went home that night repeating that text, ‘ Have faith in God.’ I retired to bed ; but still, in the

darkness of the night, I heard those words, 'Have faith in God.' Sleep left me, and during that night I was restored to God's favour.

"H——."

The subjoined note is appended to this letter by Ned Wright :

"Shortly after this man's restoration he went to work with his whole heart, sometimes hardly giving himself time to eat his food. He had not been restored to God long before it pleased the Almighty to lead his wife to the Cross. He now became very much concerned about his son at sea, and would seldom offer a prayer in the meeting without calling upon God to protect his son who was away from home. Some of our crochety friends more than once said they did not think it necessary to be always praying about one thing ; but, undaunted, our warm-hearted friend continued to wait upon God for his son's salvation, until one evening I observed, sitting beside this man, a sailor lad, apparently about seventeen years of age. The preaching being finished, I called upon two of the brethren to pray for the anxious souls. The words had hardly escaped from my lips when this man arose to his feet, and exclaimed, evidently with a heart full of praise, 'I thank Thee, O God, that Thou hast heard my poor prayers, and saved my poor sailor boy !' This scene melted the whole of us to tears, and before we parted we saw several souls brought to know the pardon of their sins through faith in the finished work of Jesus. This man and his family have removed to another part of London, and are, I believe, living consistent lives."

The next letter is from a person who desires Mr. Wright to excuse "his edukakson :"—

"January 30th, 1869.

"MY DEAR CRISTON BROTHER,—

"I rite to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ, stating the state of my soul since i have been coming to your hall, scence November last year. That was a happee day for me, prays the Lord ; I felt my sins was forgiven, thank the Lord for that, for if ever I love Jesus it is now, God bless his name. But, my dear brother, my reason for riting to you his to tell you that I have felt so happee in my mine everey since last Monday eveanin and Wednsday eveanin, and I should like to hear Christon brothers like yourself and them everey eavenin prech, if it was possible, for the benefit of all poor sinners like me. May the Lord make me thankfull for all his goodness to me.

“ Pardon me for riting to you.

“ I am, R—— H——.”

The three following letters are from persons who have now been exemplary Christians for four years past :—

“ August 21st, 1866.

“ DEAR BROTHER WRIGHT,—

“ At your request I will try and tell you how Jesus found me one Sunday morning, while in school. Two others and myself were sitting on a form, and I asked them if they would come for a walk when we came out, and we all agreed ; and I said to the two others, ‘ Will you come to the Surrey to-night ? ’ they all agreed ; and as we were going to the Surrey I said to them, ‘ I will go to all the theatres that are open for preaching ; ’ and they all said, ‘ So will I. ’ We went into the Surrey, and stayed about ten minutes, and then we all came out to go to the Victoria ; when we got there the brothers would not let us in ; so we agreed to go along the Westminster Road, and over the bridge, and go home by the Strand ; and as we were going by Astley’s I heard some of the brothers preaching outside, and when they had finished they went into Wilcock’s, and so we went in too, and sat down.

“ Brother Wright was speaking, and as I sat still listening my heart very nigh broke. About eight o'clock the other two asked me to come home, and I said I would stop until it was over ; but they went out, and I followed them ; and when we got outside I said, ‘ That man very nigh broke my heart ; ’ they said the same. I said to them, ‘ I will go next Sunday night ; ’ they said the same (I was not converted then). The next Sunday night came ; I called for them, but they would not come, but promised me they would go the following Sunday. I never went that Sunday, and so I called for them the next Sunday ; then they would not come, and so then the devil wanted me to stop back ; but I went by myself, and that same night I was converted. Brother Wright was speaking about God so loving the world as to give Jesus, and that whosoever believeth on Him should be saved ; and so I thought my name was there, and I believed on Him and was saved ; and I have been happy every since that Sunday night (before Good Friday) ; but before I was miserable ; I used to dread night coming ; and oh ! when I laid my head down, I used to think if I was never to open my eyes no more on this earth where should I spend my eternity ?

“ The devil used to say, ‘ Oh, never mind, you will be a better boy to-morrow, ’ but when that to-morrow of his came I was worse than before. Dear brother, when you are speaking tell the people about me ; tell the people that I could never find any peace anywhere until I found peace in Jesus. I have been converted about five months, and was never so happy in all my life as I am now.

“ Do pray for my father and mother to the Lord to save them.

“ Believe me to be yours affectionately,

“ H— S—.”

“ July 23, 1865.

“ MR. WRIGHT.

“ DEAR SIR,—I write these few lines in grateful thanks

and the love of God to you, for the kind manner in which you addressed me, and told me about the Lord Jesus. Blessed be God, I have realized that He died for a poor sinner like me, on the cross, and bore my sins. Oh, Mr. Wright, you know I stood before you a poor, miserable, drunken sinner, nearly lost. Oh! if the Lord had cut me off in my sins, where would my poor soul be? Oh, my soul, thanks be to God for Jesus. Blessed be His name, He bore my sins on the cross to save my poor soul, that I might live. Oh! He is my Saviour. Oh! the sinner ought to love Him, and have faith in Him; He loves to save poor sinners; in Him I have found peace, joy, and happiness, which I had not till I found Jesus. Oh, Mr. Wright, before I met with you I can assure you the devil had fast hold of me; but the blessed Lord Jesus has saved my soul.

“H—— W——.”

“August 24th, 1866.

“DEAR FRIEND,—

“When about sixteen I left home, which was not a very good one, and began gambling, such as bagatelle, dominoes, and other things of vice, which of course wanted a good deal of money to carry out, and my earnings were not enough; so, with companions as bad as myself, I took to thieving, and was taken up twice, found guilty, and had three months' imprisonment. When there I formed some good resolutions, thought I would not pick up with my bad companions again; but it was only in myself, so it did not last long, and I was as bad as ever again, or even worse, always wanting to be going to the theatre, or concerts, or some gay place of amusement; so about this time, having a brother in London, I thought I would go; so I told my mother my intentions, and she, thinking it best for me, as I should be away from all my companions, consented to let me go; but after I came to London I was

as bad as before, going into all kinds of gay company, the theatres, and concerts, and every other gay place ; but after a time I was walking along the Blackfriars Road, when I saw a young man preaching the gospel. I stood up to hear him, and he said, 'Sinner ! God loves you.' It quite struck me, although I did not know what it meant ; but still I kept always thinking of those words ; they seemed meant for me alone, but they were not so ; for there were many more present. Then he began to read the 16th verse of the 3rd chapter of St. John : ' God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

" But the word 'whosoever' he kept calling out ; it was not some that were called, it was all that would believe ; after a short time he said they would sing a verse or two of a hymn : it was that one which begins with 'I do believe, I do believe, that on the cross He shed His blood for me ;' after that he said he was going to the Victoria Hall, which was close by. I went home, got the Bible, found the verse, and read it, and found the words he had repeated were the same. Then I began thinking how God could love such a hell-deserving sinner as I had been, so I fell down on my knees, and prayed to Him to show me in what way I was to know that He loved me, and how I was to love Him. I continued praying and praying until Sunday evening. I went to the Victoria Theatre, and heard a dear young man preach, one who had been as vile a sinner as myself ; and there I thought if God could forgive him, one who had stolen, and been a prize-fighter, He would forgive me ; so, going home, I prayed, and continued praying all the week, asking God to forgive me ; and the next Sunday I went to the Victoria Theatre again, and heard the gospel preached, and stayed to the prayer-meeting. It was then that I knew my sins, which were many, were all forgiven. Then the young man that had preached the gospel to us

took me by the hand, and began singing that beautiful hymn—

' There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.'

" I then went home rejoicing in the Lord, and told many what he had done for me ; and ever since I have been much happier than before ; thank God for it !

" I am, dear friend, yours most truly,

"A— A—.

" Mr. E. Wright."

CHAPTER XIV.

Ned as an evangelist in the country.—An Irish critic.—In Scotland.
—Curious ruse.— At Brighton, Wilton, and Folkestone.—Testimonial.—A publican giving up his business.—Labours in London.
—Conclusion.

MR. WRIGHT still continues his evangelistic labours in the country. Although the metropolis affords a wide scope for his peculiar gifts, he deems it better not to confine his efforts to the great city. He is confessedly an evangelist. He knows the peculiar temptations which beset the lowest classes of society ; he can enter into their feelings, meet their difficulties, and gain their rapt attention.

In some of the large towns he has visited large audiences, composed of all classes, have awaited him. Men of culture have listened with profit to his earnest eloquence, and have thanked him for his honest and searching appeals to their consciences. In one town he visited a magistrate was converted to God through his instrumentality ; and numbers whose religion was but a thin veneering of piety, just enough to be recognized by man, but insufficient to meet with the approbation of a jealous God who abhors lukewarmness and a frigid profession of faith,* were led to a higher and truer Christian life. Men and women who could boast of little else but their morality have been awakened from their sleep of death ; while many, whose lives, on the score of morality, would not bear inspection, have become earnest and exemplary believers in Christ.

Of Ned's visit to Ireland we have already given some

* Revelation iii. 14—18.

incidents, and others might be recorded. At Dublin the preacher aroused the wrath of a critic, who favoured him with the following choice epistle :—

“ Dublin, 4th Oct., 1866.

“ RESPECTED FRIEND,—

“ I was in the Metropolitan Hall last night, for a few minutes, while you spoke of the abandoned life you led before (as you say) your conversion ; but in my opinion I do not think it right for men like you, with only a small amount of education, to stand up in the place of a minister of the gospel, and attempt to expound the Bible. What use would there be in a college such as Oxford, or Cambridge, or Dublin University, if any one could stand up ? A few months ago a fellow got up out of a coalpit, and told us he was a ruffian, and so forth, and that now he was a saint. After came a blacksmith ; and you come—a prize-fighter. No wonder for the Church of Rome to sneer at us Protestants. I do not at all want to hurt your feelings, or to daunt you ; but let me tell you that you should first go to college, and then preach. And when you told us that many a time when the devil was in you that you would strike your father to the ground, you might have kept that to yourself ; for it well showed the audience that you were unsuitable to stand up and preach to an enlightened audience. Besides, you said there was *plenty* of people in the hall whose hearts were black in sin. Now, sir, how do you know that they were black in sin ? Anybody knows that a preacher's life is easier than a baker's.

“ I remain, with all respect,

“ Your friend,

“ A PROTESTANT.

“ P.S.—I will be in the hall to-night, and will answer if you call me.

“ A P.

“ Mr. E. Wright.”

Accordingly Ned called for the Protestant baker to avow himself, but received no answer.

At *Paisley* Ned encountered a Protestant baker with other results. This man, after conversion, manifested an enthusiasm for souls which God was pleased to reward with several conversions. He sought with earnest persistency the salvation of both grown-up people and little children. He took his son to one of Ned's meetings, and also a man who had been a confirmed drunkard, and both were savingly converted the same evening. This occurred while Ned, in company with another evangelist, was on a month's preaching tour in Scotland. "I had a little room engaged in Paisley," says Ned, "where we met for prayer before the Sunday. By the Saturday night we had well covered the town with handbills; but to make sure of a good meeting I hired a large bell, and walking slowly down the streets, ringing it, I shouted as I went along, 'It's to-morrow night, at the Abercorn Rooms, at half-past six o'clock, seats all free, and there's nothing to pay.' In answer to a question from an old man, I said, 'There's a man come down here from London, who has been dead for five and twenty years, but he has been brought to life in a most mysterious way, and he's going to appear at the Abercorn Rooms to-morrow night.'" By these peculiar methods of advertising Ned succeeded in getting an audience on Sunday night of six hundred persons, to whom he related the deeply interesting story of his conversion after being "dead in trespasses and sins" for five and twenty years.

At *Glasgow* he found a little difficulty in his way. For some reason all the halls were closed against him, but the Queen's rooms; these the landlord would not let unless Ned's soberer companion pledged himself to preach a quiet discourse. Ned at this time was noisy, and his stentorian lungs and basoon-like voice were scarcely acceptable to the quiet folks of Glasgow. However, Ned

must be himself ; and as this was in the earlier part of his career as a preacher, he could not be restrained. A good opportunity for preaching the gospel presented itself to him as he was walking one day in the streets with two of his companions. To use his own expression, he was "boiling over" to speak. "Directly I stopped in the middle of the road, and shouted out the most solemn passages of Scripture I could think of, my two friends quietly walked on to the pavement ; and not caring to part company with them, I moved on too, keeping on shouting ; but at this my two friends began to trot. So, thinks I, Ned must trot too ; but not caring to be seen by the landlord of the Queen's Rooms in company with such a noisy character as myself, they took to their heels and ran for it. Seeing this, I did the same, shouting as I did so, 'Stop 'em, stop 'em !' Of course, as I ran the people did the same, and so I continued to cry out, 'Stop 'em, stop 'em !' My friends at last stopped short, thoroughly exhausted, at the bottom of a steep hill, and I ran at once to them ; and, thinking that was the only way by which I could accomplish my purpose, I put my hand upon Howard's arm, and cried out, 'I've got them, I've got them !' The people soon gathered round, and in less than five minutes there was a large crowd. My two friends were ready to burst with laughter ; but I managed to keep my countenance, and commenced addressing them." Beginning by turning his race and capture of his friends to a good illustrative account, he went on to speak of how Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. The other speakers aided Wright, and the meeting proved successful.

At *Greenock* the preaching party went to a fair, where they purchased an egg-chest, which served as a platform, from which Ned delivered addresses to the pleasure-seeking crowds.

A series of meetings held at *Brighton* were greatly

owned of God. The Oxford Music Hall was crowded to excess, hundreds being unable to gain admittance, and several most interesting instances of the power of God's grace were brought to light. Similar results flowed from preaching in *Ipswich*.

At *Wilton* he preached in the Independent Chapel, which was thrown open for working people. "It was cheering," says an account which appeared in the newspaper, "to see these poor men and women coming up by hundreds to hear one from among themselves. On Monday the people again came by hundreds, some from a distance of eleven miles." A young woman had left the meeting convinced of sin ; in the middle of the night she got up, saying to her mother, "I cannot lie any longer ; I must see the preacher." Accordingly the mother went to Ned's lodgings, just as he was falling asleep, and begged him to see her daughter at once. He did so, and after prayer the girl professed to find peace.

At *Folkestone* several services have been held at various times, and very pleasing reports have been furnished of good done there. Several young people were brought to the Saviour, one who was a Sabbath-school teacher. Two boys, living in the town, had quarrelled, and they retired to a convenient spot where they might indulge in a fight. At last one of them was so severely thrashed that he had to give in, though he vowed vengeance upon the adversary who had beaten him. In the evening, led by curiosity, both lads unexpectedly met at the town-hall, where Ned Wright was preaching. In the course of his address Ned alluded to an incident which occurred in his own life that was in direct contrast to these lads' behaviour to each other. The narrative deeply affected the defeated, but vindictive lad, who stretched out his hand to his companion, and bursting into tears, said in a broken voice, "I'm very sorry indeed for what I said to you to-day up yonder ; but I hope you'll forgive me, and let us be friends

again." It is not every boy who had vowed vengeance against an antagonist who would submit voluntarily to make an apology ; but the other boy was as manly in his reply, when he said, " I was as much to blame as you, and I hope you will forget all that has happened, and let us be firm friends for the future."

Some of the letters received by Mr. Wright from persons who trace their conversion to hearing the gospel he preached at Folkestone are very affecting ; and, as a token of their appreciation of his services, a number of persons presented him with a very handsome dressing-case, accompanied by a letter, which said :

" We, the undersigned, wish to present you with a token of our deepest gratitude and affection for the many blessings which God has made you the means of conveying to us ; above all, for that greatest of blessings, the knowledge of a Saviour's love, of which many of us have been ignorant up to this time.

" We trust that we shall live in your memory and in your prayers, as you will in ours. May God bless you more and more in the sphere in which He has placed you ; and that we may all meet at His right hand in glory is the prayer of all who love you."

The testimonial is signed by eighteen persons.

After preaching one evening at a country place about sixteen miles from London, Ned, needing refreshment, called at a public-house, and had a bottle of ginger-beer in the tap-room. " As soon as we entered," says Ned, " we found four or five men smoking their pipes, some at the table, and one young man sitting in the chimney corner, who at once took his pipe from his mouth, and concealed it with his hands ; but the smoke oozing out between his fingers, I said, ' Go on with your pipe, old chap ; don't be afraid of me.' ' Amen,' cried one ; ' So be it,' said another ; but our young friend said, ' Well, sir, I am not like these here ; I know that I have a soul, and that it is unsaved,

and I am on the road to hell.' I found out that he had been listening to me on the night previous, so I pointed him to Jesus ; and taking advantage of the opportunity, I dropped down upon my knees, and poured out my soul to God for his salvation. On opening my eyes, after I had done praying, I found all the pipes were out, and the landlord and his wife were kneeling by my side. Before I left the house, both the landlord and his wife, and also the young man, professed to have found the Saviour. And the following day, just before I left the place, I learnt that the landlord had sent an advertisement to a local paper, announcing his intention to sell his public-house : his reason for doing so was that he could not serve two masters, and so he meant to quit the business altogether."

Of the character of Ned's work in the metropolis we have given many illustrations, as also of his special efforts among thieves. The services in the Gospel Hall are conducted by his many helpers during his absence. Some of these helpers are earnest and intelligent men, who have gained the ear of the poor, and know well how to tell the story of the Cross. Special meetings, in addition to those for the dishonest, have been held at various times. Tea meetings for mothers, for costermongers, and others have been highly successful. In 1869 a few young converts clubbed together to pay the rent of the Milton Hall, near the Elephant and Castle, for a few weeks, that Ned might preach there. Two "midnight meetings" for fallen women have been held—the second being protracted till eight o'clock in the morning, when Ned accompanied twenty-one of these poor creatures to a home. It was a bitterly cold morning, a severe north wind, rain and sleet falling heavily. Some of the girls had borrowed either their bonnets, or shawls, or boots, and had to send them back before they could go to the home. It was a pitiable sight to see them trudging along the Blackfriars Road, some without bonnets and others without shawls, and most but

ill-clad. The "way of transgressors" did seem hard. One poor girl, fair as a flower, was admitted to Guy's Hospital, where she died, rejoicing that "her sins, which were many, were all forgiven her."

Many incidents that occur in the course of some of the services at the Gospel Hall would startle the reader as unheard-of novelties in religious worship. Interruptions, however, occur but rarely. Sometimes urgent requests for prayer are made. Thus, a young man pencils a letter to Mr. Wright, asking as a favour that he would pray for him. "I am sure," he says, "your prayers will be heard. I have been out of employment ever since my conversion; but, thanks be to God, I am not sorry for my conversion. So I hope you will offer up a prayer or two, and God will answer them. Bless the Lord for everything. So I now leave it with you. From a young convert that is in the meeting at the present time. Amen."

Cases have occurred in which, under the influence of powerful appeals, persons have even screamed aloud for mercy. One evening, while Ned was solemnly discoursing on the terrors of the lost, a lady-like woman shrieked as if in agony, and cried for Heaven's forgiveness. Her terror of mind was fearful, and awakened sympathy in the breasts of all present. The same evening, however, she professed to have found the Saviour, and her radiant face spoke of the hidden calm which had possessed her heart. This woman had belonged to good society; but one false step in life had divorced her from her husband and all her friends. For twenty years she had bitterly repented of her sin, and had been told by a clergyman, to whose ear she had confided her sorrowful history, to go on repenting; but it was not until she heard Ned preach that she learnt that there was forgiveness with God, that He might be feared. Her means were very limited, and she had contracted debts which, it is believed, have now by her industry been entirely paid.

Sometimes Ned is favoured with letters by persons who for various reasons do not desire to give their names and addresses ; and these communications relate to the good impressions which they have received from his preaching. A desire to test the sincerity of the change which they hope and believe they have realized induces some of them to suppress for a time their names. One correspondent thanks the preacher for so plainly preaching Christ, and begs that he will ask God to reveal Himself to the writer's distracted heart ; another complains of spiritual deadness, and manifests the energy of his religious life by deploring the evil to which he fears he is subject ; another has been perplexed by difficulties of a doctrinal type, and has been harassed by theological doubts. One young woman, brought up with those who had espoused an extreme Calvinism, was in much distress of mind as to whether she could be "one of the elect." Ned had met this young woman at a Night Refuge, and finding her to be a moral and upright person, though in the deepest distress, he took her home with him, and Mrs. Wright speedily procured her some food. "When this was placed before her," says Ned, "although only a piece of broiled haddock, with a cup of tea and some bread and butter, it was with difficulty we got her to eat : the cause of this, no doubt, was the natural effect of going without food for three days and two nights. However, after two or three attempts, she managed to consume the meal, when I thought it my duty to speak to her upon the more important question of her soul's salvation." In the course of conversation, Ned found that not only was she well acquainted with Scripture—she had almost learnt "the Psalms" by heart—but was able to reason very speciously. It was some weeks before the stranger felt the power of the gospel.

"It was wonderful to see the rebellion of this precious soul against the truths of the gospel. At times she would start up and exclaim, 'Does not the Bible say, "Elect

according to the foreknowledge of God," "Predestinated from before the foundation of the world?"' In answer to which I said, one night, when she had been with us about three weeks, 'Can you tell me whether this special class of persons for whom Jesus died had any particular name by which they might be distinguished or not?' At this question she hesitated, and noticing her hesitation, I said, 'Now, I believe that the special class of persons for whom Jesus died, and rose again, are called by a particular name, the two first letters of which are *s i*. I shall say no more about it to-night, but leave you to guess between this and the morning what this name really is, and whether you are included among the number.' I and my dear wife had no sooner adjourned to our bedroom, and closed the door, than we both knelt down and cried to God that He would awaken this most precious soul to see her lost and ruined state. The morning came, when, as a family, we met for prayer and reading, at the close of which I abruptly asked my young friend whether she had found out the name the people were called by for whom Jesus died. Tears started from her eyes, and rushed down her cheeks, as with utterance half-choked she said, 'The only name I can think of—and I have been thinking of it all night—to which the initials refer, is that of *SINNER*.' 'Then,' said I, 'do you think you are included in that little word?' To which she exclaimed, 'Yes, I believe it; I am a sinner, and I can believe that Jesus died for me.' And we all praised God that the lost was now found, and the lame had been made to walk."

This young woman was put to honest employment, and aided to emigrate. This is not the only distressed person whom Ned has befriended and saved from poverty and crime. Even in his poorest circumstances the friendless have shared his meals with him, and have been sheltered by his worthy wife, until they have gained

work. Indeed, labouring, as he does, among those who have sunk into the deepest poverty, it is essential that help should be afforded them. The missionary to the poor must help them when facing starvation, if he desires to succeed in his spiritual mission. Whatever may be the faults of indiscriminate charity,—and there is a danger of magnifying them,—the relief that is granted to those who are personally known to be deserving must be humane and Christian. We hope that Mr. Wright may not fail to receive, in carrying on his good work, that measure of support which a Christian public is not loth to give to a deserving and philanthropic object. For his soup suppers, relief agencies, and the rent of the buildings in which he carries on his labours, he is necessarily dependent on public aid, and feels at liberty to appeal for such a purpose, although for his own and his family's maintenance he is, as we have before said, supported by those who feel moved at various times to keep him from want.

Above all is he solicitous that the gospel should be preached to the poor, the social outcast, to those who doggedly profess to have no confidence in either ministers or missionaries, of whom there are, alas! too many amongst the lowest classes in the great city. In this noble work our prayers follow him. "We have confidence in the Lord touching him," that in all his enterprises for God's glory and man's welfare he will be led, guided, and sustained by the Good Hand which has thus far upheld him.

THE END.





