

languid lids were lifted from the deep grey eyes, and in their steady look Frank saw knowledge.

"Work, man; grind away at something; grind hard. It must be damnable!" Howard spoke roughly, almost gruffly.

"I couldn't—quite at first," answered Frank, brokenly. "I—I have lost the grip. . . It all slips. . . I get back—there —" He shuddered. "In the cell—there was a star that used to shine between the bars. . . You'll find it all there. He held a roll of MS. towards Howard. "I should like you to read it, then burn it, or do what you like with it," he said, with the weary irritation in his voice that Howard had noticed the previous night. He pulled himself together with an effort. "Good-bye! Thank you for to-day!"

"Good-bye!"

Their hands and eyes met, then quite contrary to his previous intention Howard gave Frank Osmond his card. "That's my Melbourne address; write or look me up when you have the inclination."

He stood and watched the stooping, solitary figure plunging into the deepening shadows.

"Poor devil!" he muttered, "he's made a muddle of it." He put the roll of MS. into the pocket of his overcoat, and turned his attention to the sawmill, where Frank Osmond had assured him he would find a hearty welcome and accommodation for the night.

"Sawyer Thomas" was standing at the mill entrance, "in the attitude of a pork-butcher taking an airing at his shop door," commented Howard. He was a round-faced, good-humoured-looking man, clean shaven and close cropped, not a bit like the typical farmer or woodman, and might have passed for any age between thirty and fifty. With brisk, smart movements he conducted Howard to the clean parlour of the cottage attached to the mill, then with nimble fingers prepared and served a substantial meal, apologising for the absence of "Polly," who had gone into the township marketing.

"You ought to be proprietor of an inn," remarked Howard. "You don't look in your natural element among the timber."

"It was religion drew me into solitude!" he answered mournfully.

Howard looked at the red, round face, and keen blue eyes. "Not a *spirituelle* type, quite," he commented mentally.

"For contemplation?" he queried.

"Contemplation be blowed!" answered Thomas, who certainly was not a saint. "I run away with me own wife of five years standin'—cut an' run with 'er!"

In a tempest of recollection he swept some of the china off the table.

"Easy! Right you are, sir! But whenever I think of religion I feel wicked!"

He carefully picked up the pieces and carried away the tray. Presently he returned, as though he could not resist the unaccustomed luxury of having a listener.

"You're not a parson?"

"I'm a writer."

"Parsons are cranks. 'Owsoever, I put it to you. I'd as nice a little 'am and pork pie business as you'd wish to see, an' all gone to the dogs because of them bloomin' saints! That's were Polly was weak—I will say that for Polly she was inconsistent—first, she would 'ave the pie shop an' then she wouldn't 'ave it. When I first courted Polly she was the sensiblist an' the prettiest girl at meetin'. 'To see 'er a singin' of the 'ims with one eye on Kingdom Come an' the other on me, so ter speak, did a man's 'eart good. It sort o' balanced things. But Polly 'ad a decent sorter ambition them days.

"No, Thomas," she ses, 'we'll wait till you can set up for yerself,' she ses, 'if it's ever such a small way. You've been in the business long enough to know what's what.' That's what Polly sed.

"So we waited, an' in this 'ere country a feller needn't wait for ever if 'e's got any sorter shove in the shoulder 'e puts to the wheel. First, 'e wants to know what 'e's a-shovin' for—then to go on shovin'."

"Ah!" said Howard, "have a cigar. Well?"