

When the sawyer came in to show him his bedroom he roused and looked at him vacantly, making some unintelligible reply.

"E's a bit of a crank," said Thomas to Polly, "them writin' chaps mostly is, but they've got their morals, an' not that 'eathenish either. Blest if I wouldn't back 'em, cranks, an' all, against some o' the religion I've been initiated inter."

The fire burned itself into a red ash, and Howard only shifted his position to spread the MS. sheets on the table before him, and to bend over them, his head leaning upon his hand.

He was absorbed, fascinated. Defiance that was almost blasphemous, pathos that exacted tears, passion and strength that swept argument before them he met in the pages the young ex-convict had told him "to burn or do as he liked with." The story was without constructive ability, save that which the mood of the hour had stamped upon it. But——

"It is genius," he said, with the artist's appreciation, "genius." Then again very humbly, "genius! Not mechanism, not talent, not art."

The white dawn was struggling with the darkness when Howard, looking worn and old, crossed to the window. With his hands in his trouser pockets he leant against the frame, and with tired eyes looked towards the east.

Light! Light! That was the first essential. It preceded formation—heralded life. This weakling (?) had that light of intuition which found in a flash what the scientist searched for all his life—what the plodder never reached. What he would never reach. For the first time in his life Howard Grey was lonely; he felt a castaway. As a lad all by himself at his tasks he had peopled his world with the to-be and to-come of his own creation.

"I—myself" had been his rectitude, his sufficiency, but his visions and dreams of greatness had trailed off into nothingness as the early morning vapours would disappear before the rising sun. Bereft of his visions life was bare hard fact to him.

"I am an artizan," he said, with merciless self-judgment. "I am my father's son—I should have made a careful craftsman! I have a keen interest with the carpenter who finishes his common wood with a layer of veneer."

Impatient anger rose in his heart against the man so richly endowed, who had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; he must be made to understand.

"Fool and blind!" he thought, "to spend an hour in regret. He must work, and work, and work. He wept for a lost world He can charm it to his mood; make it weep or laugh at his will."

He walked up and down the room restlessly. He forgot all that he had himself accomplished. He had been patient, he told himself; he had the knack of waiting while things developed, had not been in haste to pluck unripe fruit; could balance one foot on a stone while he planted the other before him, but at this hour he felt his way had no beyond.

"I envy him!" exclaimed the successful man, thinking of the lad he had lately despised, as he rested his hand on the MS—"I have missed just—this."

Howard threw himself upon the rough couch, and fell asleep, worn out with his conflict.

When Frank Osmond turned away that afternoon the sense of his own physical and moral deterioration overwhelmed him. He plunged on, unheeding where he went, blind with pain, conscious of nothing but the stifling pressure of his own misery. The impoverishment of his life—spoiled by his own hand—faced him as it had never done. It was hideous in its barrenness; far as his thought could reach it spread out dun and grey under the shadow of disgrace. What would he not give for the chance he had discarded, the honour thrown away; like Howard Grey with his face turned cityward.

He stopped and turned instinctively where his companion had gone. His pale cheeks flushed involuntarily—a "gaol-bird" had no place among honourable men!