









## **Contents**

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHAPTER XV.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHAPTER XX.



## CHAPTER I.

As the Capital Express train dashed into the village of Bruceton one bright afternoon, a brakeman passing through a car was touched on the shoulder by a man, who said, —

"The man that left this in the seat in front got out three stations back. You don't s'pose he'll want it again an' send back for it, do you?"

The brakeman looked at an object which the speaker held up as he spoke: it was a small fig-box, such as train-boys sometimes succeed in imposing upon the traveling public, and it still contained several figs.

"Want it again?" said the brakeman, with a scornful curl of the lip that gave his black moustache a Mephistophelian twist, "of course not. He left it there so's to get rid of it, like most of 'em do. I wouldn't buy one of them boxes of —"

The brakeman suddenly ceased talking, and put both hands on the passenger's shoulders with the movement peculiar to train-men whose duty it is to rouse sleeping passengers, the effect always being to make the victim throw his head slightly backward. Then the brakeman looked a moment into the face before him, — it was small, weak-eyed, and characterless, — and continued, —

"Why, Sam Kimper, I didn't know you from Adam! That broad-brimmed low hat makes you look like somebody else. When did you get out?"

"This mornin'," said the passenger, dropping his eyes.

"Did, eh? Well, you needn't feel so bad about it, old man. Anybody's likely to get in trouble once in a while, you know. You got caught; some other folks 'most always don't; that's about the difference. Let's see; how long was you — how long have you been away?"

"I was *sent* for two years an' a half," said the passenger, raising his head again and looking almost manly, "but, Mr. Briggs, I got all the shortenin' of time that's allowed for good conduct, — ev'ry day of it.

If you don't believe it, I'll prove it to you. My term begun on the 11th of August, eighteen hundred an' —"

"Never mind the figures, old man: I'll take your word for it."

"But I wanted you to be sure; I thought mebbe you'd tell other folks about it, seein' you're a good-hearted feller, an' know ev'ry-body, an' I never done you no harm."

"I'll tell 'em anyway," said the brakeman, cheerily; "I ain't no saint, but I'm always ready to help a fellow up when he's down. I've got to get to the rear now, to uncouple a car we have to leave here. S'long, Sam."

"Say, Mr. Briggs," said the passenger, hurrying along behind the brakeman, "you don't s'pose there's any chance for me to get a job in the railroad-company's yard, do you?"

The brakeman turned with a sharp look which speedily softened as he saw an earnest appeal in the little man's face.

"Well, Sam," he replied, his words dragging slowly along, "the yard's always full, an' men a-waitin'. You'd have to give bonds for good behavior, an' honesty, an' —"

"Never mind the rest, Mr. Briggs," said the ex-convict, shrinking an inch or two in stature. "I didn't know about that, indeed I didn't, or I —"

"Well, you needn't be a-Mr.-Briggs-in' me, anyhow," said the brakeman. "I was only Jim before — you left town, Sam, an' I want you to go on callin' me Jim, just the same. Do you understand that, confound you?"

"Yes, Mr. — Jim, I do; an' may God bless you for sayin' it!"

"Here we are; good luck by the car-load to you, Sam." Then the brakeman looked back into the car and roared, —

"Bruceton."

The discharged prisoner consumed a great deal of time and distributed many furtive glances as he alighted, though he got off the train on the side opposite the little station. The train remained so long that when finally it started there was no one on the station

platform but the agent, whose face was not familiar to the last passenger.

A gust of wind brought to the platform a scrap of a circus-poster which had been loosened by recent rain from a fence opposite the station. The agent kicked the paper from the platform; Sam picked it up and looked at it; it bore a picture of a gorgeously-colored monkey and the head and shoulders of an elephant.

"Ain't you goin' to put it back?" he asked.

"Not much," said the agent. "I don't rent that fence to the circus, or menagerie, or whatever it is."

"Can I have it?"

"Findings are keepings," said the agent, "especially when they ain't worth looking for; that's railroad rule, and I guess circus-companies haven't got a better one."

The finder sat down on the platform, took a knife from his pocket, and carefully cut the monkey and the elephant's head from the paper. Then he walked to the end of the platform and looked cautiously in the direction of the town. A broad road, crossed by a narrow street, led from the station; into the street the little man hurried, believing himself secure from observation, but just then the door of a coal-yard office opened, and Judge Prency, who had been county judge, and Deacon Quickset emerged. Both saw the new arrival, who tried to pass them without being recognized. But the deacon was too quick for him; planting himself in the middle of the sidewalk, which was as narrow as the deacon was broad, he stopped the wayfarer and said, —

"Samuel, I hope you're not going back to your old ways again, — fighting, drinking, loafing, and stealing?"

"No, deacon, I ain't. I'm a changed man."

"That's what they all say, Samuel," the deacon replied, not unkindly, "but saying isn't doing. Human nature's pretty weak when it don't lean on a stronger one."

"That's how I'm leanin', deacon."

"I'm glad to hear it, Samuel," said the deacon, offering his hand, though in a rather conservative manner.

"Sam," said the judge, "I sentenced you, but I don't want you to think hard of me and take it out of my orchard and chicken-coop. It wasn't your first offence, you know."

"Nor the tenth, judge. You did just right. I hope 'twas a warnin' to others."

"I think it was," said the judge, thrusting both hands into his pockets and studying the wall of the station as if it were the record of his own court. "I think it was; and here's my hand, Sam, and my best wishes for a square start in life."

As the judge withdrew his hand he left behind a little wad of paper which Sam recognized by sense of touch as the customary American substitute for the coin of the realm. The poor fellow did not know what to say: so he said nothing.

"Hurry along to your family, Sam. I hope you'll find them all well. I've told my wife to see to it that they didn't suffer while you were away, and I guess she's done it: she's that kind of woman."

Sam hurried away. The deacon followed him with his eyes, and finally said, —

"I wonder how much truth there was in him — about leaning on a higher power?"

"Oh, about as much as in the rest of us, I suppose."

"What do you mean?" The deacon snapped out this question; his words sounded like a saw-file at work.

"Merely what I say," the judge replied. "We all trust to our religion while things go to suit us, but as soon as there's something unusual to be done — in the way of business — we fall back on our old friend the Devil, just as Sam Kimper used to do."

"Speak for yourself, judge, and for Sam, if you want to," said the deacon with fine dignity, "but don't include me among 'the rest of us.' Good-morning, judge."

"Good-morning, deacon. No offence meant."

"Perhaps not; but some men give it without meaning to. Good-morning."

"I guess the coat fits him," murmured the judge to himself, as he sauntered homeward.

## CHAPTER II.

Sam Kimper hurried through a new street, sparsely settled, crossed a large vacant lot, tramped over the grounds of an unused foundry, and finally went through a vacancy in a fence on which there were only enough boards to show what the original plan had been. A heap of ashes, a dilapidated chicken-coop, and a forest of tall dingy weeds were the principal contents of the garden, which had for background a small unpainted house in which were several windows which had been repaired with old hats and masses of newspaper. As he neared the house he saw in a cove in the weeds a barrel lying on its side, and seated in the mouth of the barrel was a child with a thin, sallow, dirty, precocious face and with a cat in her arms. The child stared at the intruder, who stopped and pushed his hat to the back of his head.

"Pop!" exclaimed the child, suddenly, without moving.

"Mary!" exclaimed the man, dropping upon his knees and kissing the dirty face again and again. "What are you doin' here?"

"Playin' house," said the child, as impassively as if to have had her father absent two years was so common an experience that his return did not call for any manifestation of surprise or affection.

"Stand up a minute, dear, and let me look at you. Let's see,—you're twelve years old now, ain't you? You don't seem to have growed a bit. How's the rest?"

"Mam's crosser an' crosser," said the child; "Joe's run away, 'cause the constable was after him for stealin' meat from—"

"My boy a thief! Oh, Lord!"

"Well, we didn't have nothin' to eat; he had to do it."

The father dropped his head and shuddered. The child continued: "Billy's goin' to school now; Jane's servant-gal at the hotel; Tom

plays hookey all the time, an' the baby squalls so much that nobody likes her but Billy."

The man looked sad, then thoughtful; finally he put his arm around his child, and said, as he kissed and caressed her, —

"You're to have a better dad after this, darlin'; then maybe the mother'll feel pleasanter, an' the baby'll be happier, an' Tom'll be a good boy, an' we'll get Joe back somehow."

"How's you goin' to be better?" asked the child.

"Goin' to give us money to buy candy an' go to all the circuses?"

"Maybe," said the father. "I must go see the mother now."

The child followed her father to the house; there was not much excitement in the life of the Kimper family, except when there was a quarrel, and Mary seemed to anticipate some now, for she drawled, as she walked along, —

"Mam's got it in for you; I heerd her say so many a time sence you war took away."

"The poor thing's had reason enough to say it, the Lord knows," said the man. "An'," he continued, after a moment, "I guess I've learned to take whatever I'm deservin' of."

As Sam entered his house, a shabbily dressed, unkempt, forlorn looking woman sat at a bare pine table, handling some dirty cards. When she looked up, startled by the heavy tread upon the floor, she exclaimed, —

"I declare! I didn't expect you till —"

"Wife!" shouted Sam, snatching the woman into his arms and covering her face with kisses. "Wife," he murmured, bursting into tears and pressing the unsightly head to his breast, — "wife, wife, wife, I'm goin' to make you proud of bein' my wife, now that I'm a man once more."

The woman did not return any of the caresses that had been showered upon her; neither did she repel them. Finally she said, —

"You *do* appear to think somethin' of me, Sam."

"Think somethin' of you? I always did, Nan, though I didn't show it like I ought. I've had lots of time to think since then, though, an' I've had somethin' else, too, that I want to tell you about. Things is goin' to be different, the Lord willin', Nan, dear — wife."

Mrs. Kimper was human; she was a woman, and she finally rose to the occasion to the extent of kissing her husband, though immediately afterward she said, apparently by way of apology, —

"I don't know how I come to do that."

"Neither do I, Nan; I don't know how you can do anythin' but hate me. But you ain't goin' to have no new reason for doin' it. I'm goin' to be different ev'ry way from what I was."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Kimper, releasing herself from her husband's arms and taking up the cards again. "I was just tellin' my fortune by the keerds, havin' nothin' else to do, an' they showed a new man an' some money, — though not much."

"They showed right both times, though keerds ain't been friends to this family, confound 'em, when I've fooled with 'em at the saloon. Where's the baby, though, that I ain't ever seen?"

"There," said the woman, pointing to a corner of the room. Sam looked, and saw on the floor a bundle of dingy clothes from one end of which protruded a head of which the face, eyes, and hair were of the same tint as the clothing. The little object was regarding the new arrival in a listless way, and she howled and averted her head as her father stooped to pick her up.

"She's afraid you're goin' to hit her, like most ev'ry one does when they go nigh her," said the mother. "If I'd knowed you was comin' to-day, I'd have washed her, I guess."

"I'll do it myself now," said the father, "I've got the time."

"Why, you ain't ever done such a thing in your life, Sam!" said Mrs. Kimper, with a feeble giggle.

"More's the shame to me; but it's never too late to mend. When'll Billy get home, an' Tom?"

"Goodness knows; Billy gets kep' in so much, an' Tom plays hokey so often, that I don't ever expect either of 'em much 'fore

supper-time. They talk of sendin' Tom to the Reform School if he don't stop."

"I'll have to stop him, then. I'll try it, anyway."

"It needs somebody that can wollup him harder'n I can; he's gettin' too big for my stren'th. Well, if here they don't both come! I don't know when I've seen them two boys together before, 'less they was fightin'. I wonder what's got into 'em to-day."

The two boys came through the back yard, eying the house curiously, Billy with wide open eyes, and Tom with a hang-dog leer from under the brim of his hat. Their father met them at the door and put his arms around both.

"Don't do that," said Tom, twitching away, "that sort o' thing's for women, an' gals an' babies."

"But I'm your dad, boy."

"Needn't make a baby of me, if you be," growled the cub.

"I'd give a good deal, old as I am, if I had a dad to make a baby of me that way, if 'twas only for a minute."

"Oh, don't be an old fool," said Tom.

"I heerd in the village you'd been let out," said Billy, "an' so I found Tom an' told him, an' he said I lied, an' so we come home to see. Did you bring us anythin'?"

"Yes," said the father, his face brightening, as he thrust his hand into his pocket and took out the fig box. "Here," as he gave a fig to each of the children and one to his wife, "how do you like that?"

"Good enough," growled Tom, "only I don't care for 'em unless I have a whole box. I lift one out of a train-boy's basket at the station once in a while."

"Don't ever do it again," said the father. "If you want 'em any time so bad you can't do without 'em, let me know, an' I'll find some way to get 'em for you."

"An' get sent up again for more'n two year?" sneered the boy.

"I don't mean to get 'em that way" said the father. "But I've got somethin' else for you." Here he took the circus pictures from his

breast, where they had been much flattened during the several demonstrations of family affection in which they had been involved. "Here's a picture for each of you."

Billy seemed to approve of the monkey, but Tom scowled and said,—

"What do I care for an elephant's head, when I seen the whole animal at the show, an' everythin' else besides?"

"S'pose I might as well get supper, though there ain't much to get," said the wife. "There's nothin' in the house but corn-meal, so I'll bile some mush. An'," she continued, with a peculiar look at her husband, "there ain't anythin' else for breakfast, though Deacon Quickset's got lots of hens layin' eggs ev'ry day. I've told the boys about it again an' again, but they're worth less than nothin' at helpin' things along. The deacon don't keep no dog. Now you've got home, I hope we'll have somethin'."

"Not if we have to get it that way," said Sam, gently. "No more stealin'; I'll die first."

"I guess we'll all die, then," moaned Mrs. Kimper. "I didn't s'pose bein' sent up was goin' to skeer all the spirit out of you."

"It didn't, Nan, but it's been the puttin' of a new kind of spirit into me. I've been converted, Nan."

"What?" gasped Mrs. Kimper.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Tom, after a hard laugh. "You goin' to be a shoutin' Methodist? Won't that be bully to tell the fellers in the vil-lage?"

"I'm not goin' to shout, or be anythin' I know of, except an honest man: you can tell that to all the fellers you like."

"An' be told I'm a blamed liar? Not much."

Mrs. Kimper seemed to be in a mournful reverie, and when finally she spoke it was in the voice of a woman talking to herself, as she said,—

"After all I've been layin' up in my mind about places where there was potatoes an' chickens an' pigs an' even turkeys that could be got

an' nobody'd be any the wiser! How will we ever get along through the winter?"

"The Lord will provide," croaked Tom, who had often sat under the church window during a revival meeting.

"If He don't, we'll do without," said Sam, "but I guess we won't suffer while I can work."

"Dad converted!" muttered Tom. "Dad converted! d'ye hear that?" said he, hitting his brother to attract attention. "I must go down to the hotel an' tell Jane; she'll steal me a glass of beer for it. Converted! I'll be ashamed to look the boys in the face."

### CHAPTER III.

The Kimper family thinned out, numerically, as soon as the frugal evening meal was despatched. Tom and Billy disappeared separately without remark; Mary put on a small felt hat which added a rakish air to her precocious face, and said she was going to the hotel to see if sister Jane had any news. Half an hour later, the cook, all the chamber-maids, waiters, bar-keepers, and stable-boys at the hostelry were laughing and jeering, in which they were led by Jane, as Mary told of her father's announcement that he had been converted and would have no more stealing done in the interest of the family larder. The fun became so fast and furious that it was obliged to end in sheer exhaustion; so when Tom came in an hour later, he was unable to revive it sufficiently to secure the stolen glass of beer which he had coveted.

Sam Kimper did not seem to notice the disappearance of the more active portion of the family. Taking the baby in his arms, he sat with closed eyes while his wife cleared the table. Finally he said, —

"Nan, ain't you got nothin' else to do?"

"Nothin', that I know of," said the wife.

"Come an' set down alongside o' me, then, an' let me tell you about somethin' that come about while I was in the penitentiary. Nan, a man that used to come there Sundays found me a-cryin' in my cell one Sunday; I couldn't help it, I felt so forlorn an' kind o' gone like. I'd felt that way lots o' times before, when I was out an'

around, but then I could get over it by takin' a drink. There's always ways of gettin' a drink,—sweepin' out a saloon, or cuttin' wood agin' winter, when the saloon'll need it. But there wasn't no chance to get a drink in jail, an' I was feelin' as if the under-pinnin' of me was gone.

"Well, the man said he knowed a friend that would stand by me an' cheer me up. His name was Jesus. I told him I'd heerd of Him before, 'cause I'd been to revival meetin's an' been preached to lots by one man an' another. He said that wasn't exactly the way he wanted me to think about Him,—said Jesus used to be alive and go around bein' sorry for folks that was in trouble, an' He once comforted a thief that was bein' killed in a most uncomfortable way, though Jesus was havin' a hard time of it Himself about that time.

"That hit me where I lived, for I—well, you know what I was sent up for. He said Jesus was God, but he came here to show men how to live, an' he wanted me to think about Him only as a man, while I was in trouble. He said the worse off a man was, the more sorry Jesus was for him: so I said,—

"I wish He was here now, then.'

"He *is* here, my friend,' said the man. 'He's here, though you can't see Him. He ain't got nothin' to make out of you: neither have I: so you needn't be afraid to take my word for it. I'll tell you some of the things he said.' Then he read me a lot of things that did make me feel lots better. Why, Nan, that man Jesus was so sorry for men in jail that He went back on some high-toned folks that didn't visit 'em: just think of that!

"After a while the man said, 'You seem to be feelin' better.'

"So I am,' said I.

"Then believe in him,' says he, 'an' you'll feel better always.'

"I've been told that before,' says I, 'but I don't know how.'

"The man looked kind o' puzzled like, an' at last says he,—

"What's yer politics?'

"I'm a Jackson Democrat,' says I.

"All right,' says he, 'but Andrew Jackson's dead, ain't he?'

"So I've heerd,' said I.

"But you still believe in him?' says he.

"Of course,' said I.

"Well,' says he, 'just believe in Jesus like you do in Andrew Jackson, and you'll be all right in the course of time. Believe that what He said was true, an' get your mind full of what He said, an' keep it full, remindin' yourself over an' over again for fear you forget it or other things'll put it out of your mind, an' you'll be happier while you're in jail, an' you won't get back here again, nor in any other jail, after you've been let out.'

"Well, that was encouragin', for I didn't want to get in no jails no more. When the man went away he left me a little book that didn't have nothin' in it but things Jesus Himself said. I read it lots; some of it I didn't understand, an' I can't get it through my head yet, but what I did get done me so much good that I found myself kind o' changin' like, an' I've been changin' ever since. Nan, I want you to read it too, an' see if it don't do you good. We ain't been what we ought to be; it's all my fault. The children ain't had no show; that's all my fault too, but it'll take all that two of us can do to catch up with 'em. I want you to be always 'side o' me, Nan."

"We can't let 'em starve," said the wife; "an' if what you're believin' is goin' to keep you from pickin' up a livin' for 'em when you get a chance, what are we goin' to do?"

"I'm goin' to work," said Sam.

"Sho! You never done three days' work hand-runnin' in your life." Then Mrs. Kimper gave a hard laugh.

"I've done it over two years now, an' I guess I can keep on, if I get the chance. I can stick to it if you'll back me up, Nan."

"There ain't much to me nowadays," said Mrs. Kimper, after a moment or two of blank staring as she held her chin in her hands and rested her elbows on her knees. "Once I had an idee I was about as lively as they make 'em, but things has knocked it out of me, — a good many kind of things."

"I know it, poor gal," said Sam; "I know it: I feel a good deal the same way myself sometimes; but it helps me along an' stren'thens

me up, like, to know that Him that the visitor in jail told me about didn't have no home a good deal of the time, an' not overmuch to eat, an' yet was cheerful like, an' always on His nerve. It braces a fellow up to think somebody's who's been as bad off as himself has pulled through, an' not stole nothin', nor fit with nobody, nor got drunk, but always was lookin' out for other folks. Say, Nan, 'pears to me it's gettin' dark all of a sudden—oh!"

The exclamation was called out by the cause of the sudden darkness, which was no other than Deacon Quickset, who had reached the door-way without being heard. The deacon's proportions were generous; those of the door were not.

"Samuel," said the deacon, "you said this afternoon that you were a changed man, and that you were leaning on a strength greater than your own. I want to see you make a new start and a fair one; and, as there's a prayer- and experience-meeting around at the church to-night, I thought I'd come around and tell you that 'twould be a sensible thing to go there and tell what the Lord's done for you. It will put you on record, and make you some friends; and you need them, you know."

Sam was pallid by nature, more so through long confinement, but he looked yet more pale as he stammered,—

"Me—speak—in meetin'? Before folks that—that's always b'longed to the church?"

"You must acknowledge Him, Samuel, if you expect Him to bless you."

"I hain't no objections to acknowledgin' Him, deacon, only—I'm not the man to talk out much before them that I know is my betters. I ain't got the gift o' gab. I couldn't never say much to the fellers in the saloon along around about election-times, though I b'lieved in the party with all my might."

"It doesn't take any gift to tell the plain truth," said the deacon. "Come along. Mrs. Kimper, you come too, so Samuel will have no excuse to stay home."

"Me?" gasped Mrs. Kimper. "Me?—in meetin'? Goodness, deacon, it gives me the conniptions to think of it! Besides,"—here she

dragged her scanty clothing about her more closely,—“I ain't fit to be seen among decent folks.”

“Clothes don't count for anything in the house of the Lord,” said the deacon, stoutly, though he knew he was lying. “Meeting begins at half-past seven, and the sun's down now.”

“Nan,” whispered Sam, “come along. You can slip in a back seat an' nobody'll see nothin' but your face. Stand by me, Nan: I'm your husband. Stand by me, so I can stand by my only friend.”

“Deacon ain't no friend o' yourn,” whispered the trembling woman in reply.

“I'm not talkin' about the deacon, Nan. Don't, go back on me. You're my wife, Nan; you don't know what that means to me now,—you reelly don't.”

Mrs. Kimper stared, then she almost smiled.

“I mean it, Nan,” whispered the man.

Mrs. Kimper rummaged for a moment in the drawers of a dilapidated bureau, and finally folded a red handkerchief and tied it over her head.

“Good!” said the deacon, who had been watching the couple closely. “We'll go around by the back way, so nobody'll see either of you, if you don't want them to. I'll take Samuel along with me, and you can drop in wherever you think best, Mrs. Kimper. I'm not going back on any man who is going to turn over a new leaf. Come along.”

#### CHAPTER IV.

The church at which Deacon Quickset worshipped was not large, nor was it ever well filled when prayer and experience were the only attractions. When Sam Kimper entered, however, the place seemed so immense and the throng so great that nothing but the bulk of the deacon, which had been prudently placed in the rear of the new convert, kept him from turning about and escaping into the darkness. Even when placed in a seat the outer end of which was occupied by the deacon, the frightened man cast his eyes appealingly towards his keeper,—for such was the relation he felt the deacon