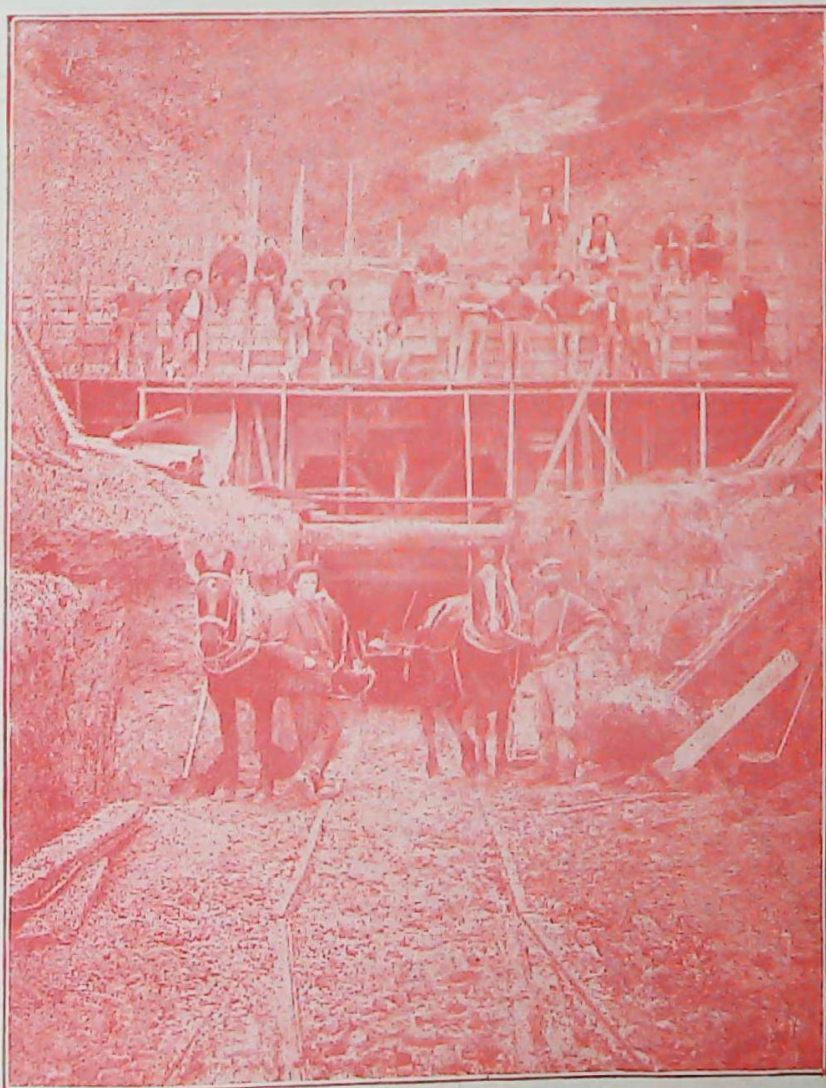


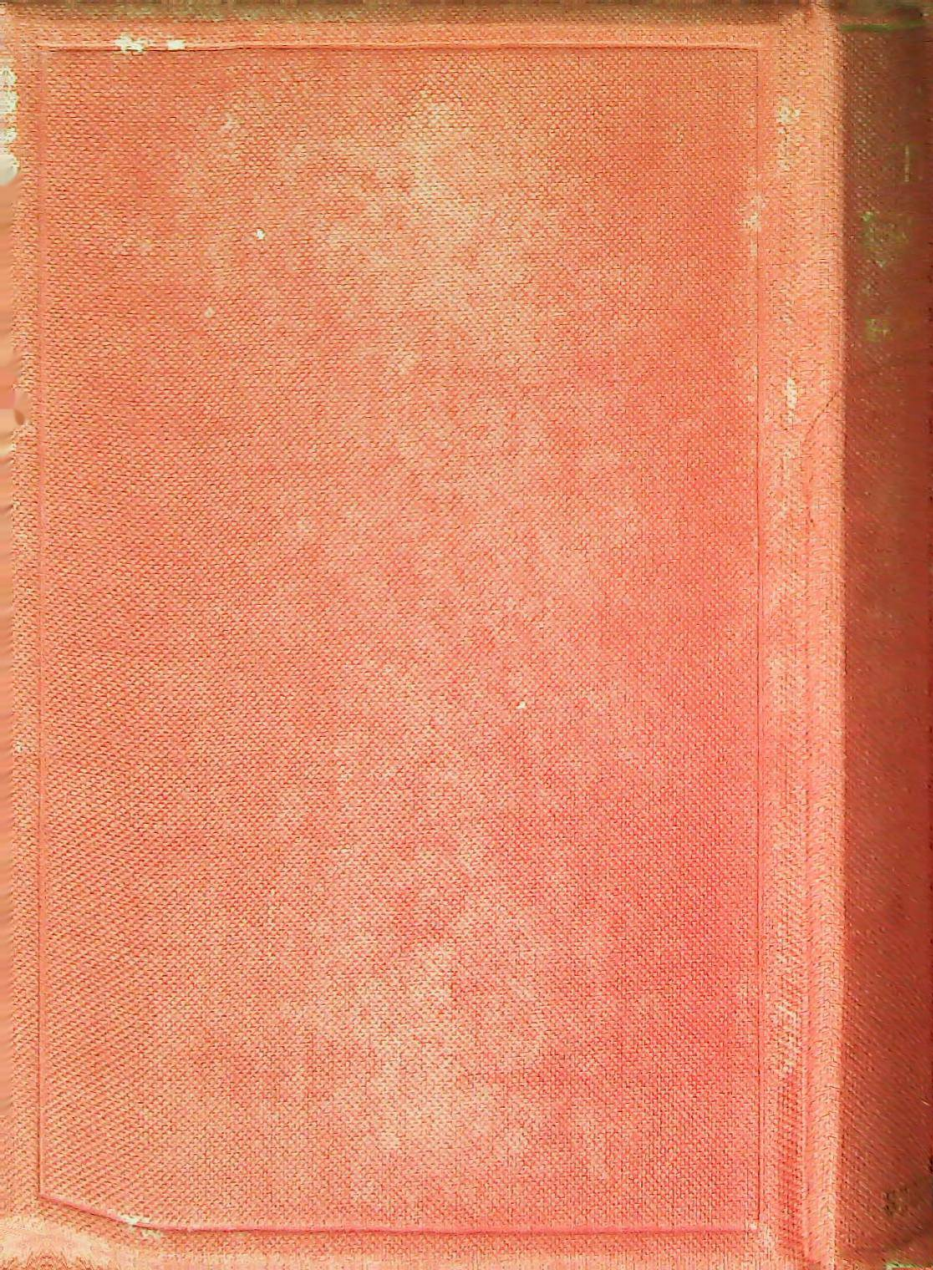
AT THE FRONT



BY

H. FOSTON.





AT THE FRONT

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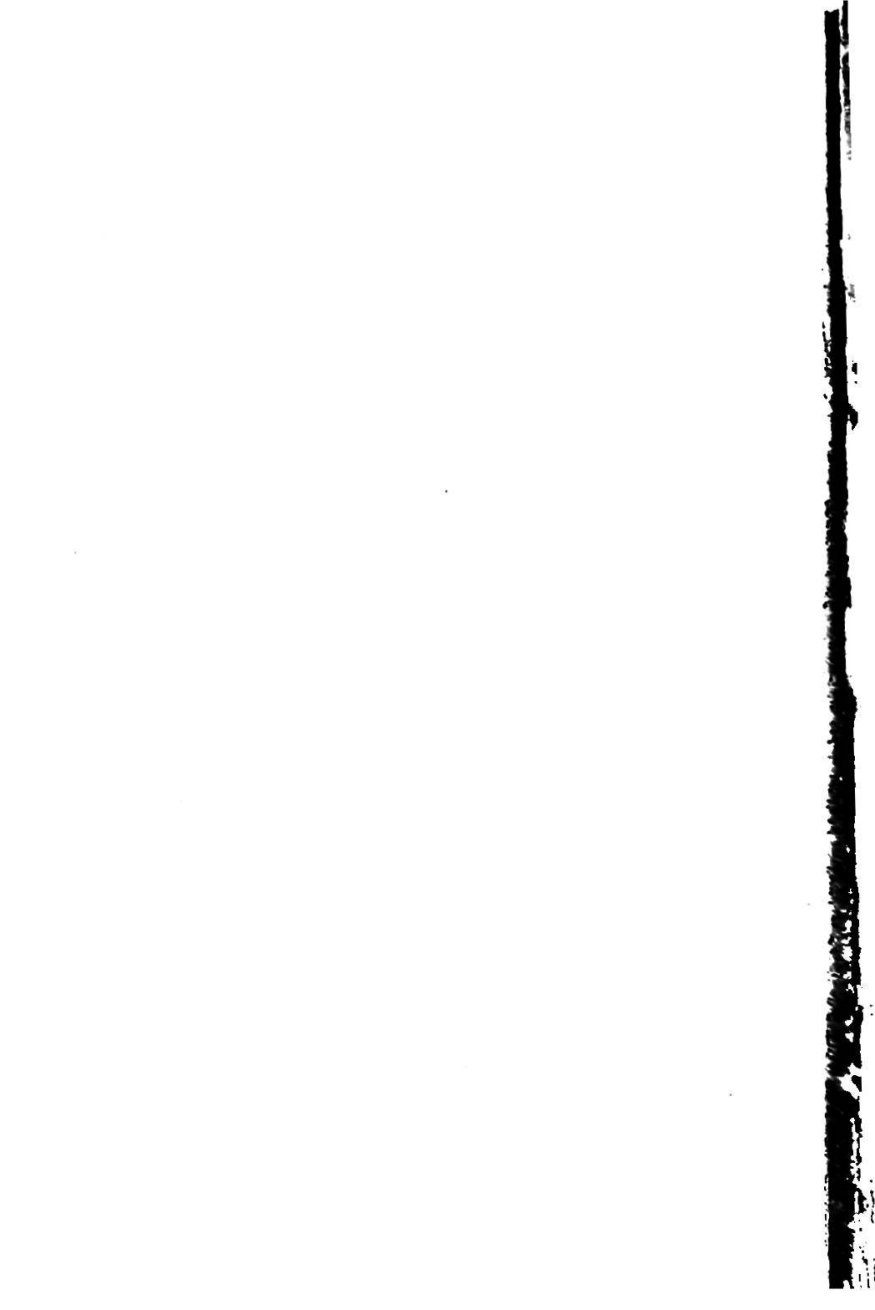
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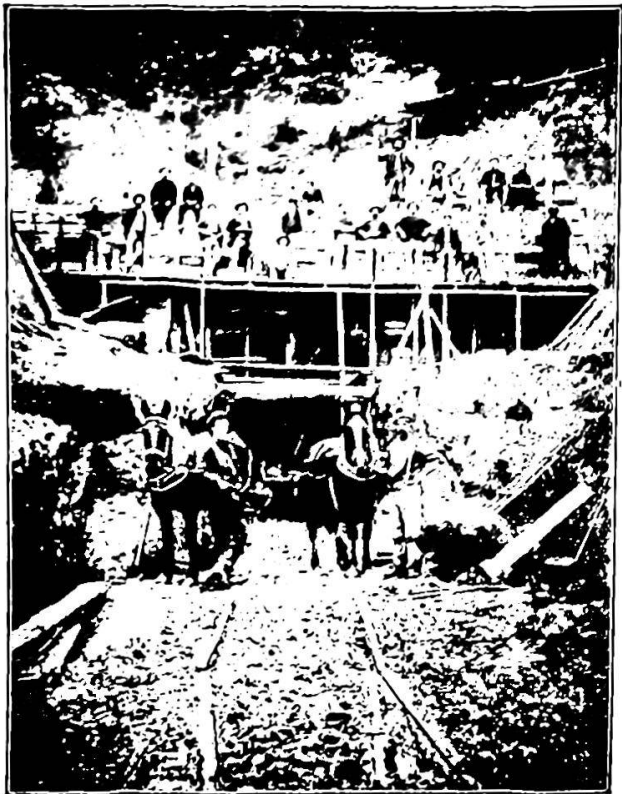




AT THE FRONT







Life at the Front of Railway Construction is full of interest.

AT THE FRONT

*A STORY OF PLUCK AND HEROISM IN
THE RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION CAMPS
IN THE DOMINION OF NEW ZEALAND*

BY
H. FOSTON



LONDON:
ARTHUR H STOCKWELL
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DEDICATION

To those who are down and want to get up, to the men and women who find the world " cold and hard " and feel that there is scarcely a " better position " in life for them, the following pages are respectfully dedicated, in the hope that some heart may be gladdened and encouraged by their message of cheer.

THE AUTHOR.

*Lower Hutt,
Wellington, N.Z.
1921.*

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The village life with its simplicity all came back to him.

AT THE FRONT

CHAPTER I

ARRESTED

" I know not what awaits me ;
God kindly veils mine eyes,
And o'er each step of my onward way
He makes new scenes to rise."

" YOU'RE arrested ! "

These words were uttered by two of London's stalwart guardians of the law, as Ralph Messenger was walking along one of the busy thoroughfares in the East End.

He was more than surprised. He was startled, and almost stunned by the words. Arrested ? Surely there was some mistake ?

Before he knew where he was, the officers of the police force had applied the iron bracelets. What did it all mean ?

" By whose authority do you place me in this position ? "

" Come along quietly, young man, and make no statements which may incriminate you ! "

He was too overwhelmed to offer any resistance, and in a short time he found himself in the lock-up at the police station, to await further investigation. His brain was in a whirl. What had happened ? Surely there was some terrible mistake ? Had he a double ? Arrested ! Arrested !

He thought, and thought, and thought. What was the cause ? Why was he there ?

Ralph Messenger's history was full of interest. Born in the East End of London, his childhood was marred through the conditions which surrounded his natal day. Some men and women are born into the world severely handicapped. Ralph was one of these. Early

in life he had lost his mother, who had been persuaded to leave the country, and the village hedge-rows, and the meadows, with their carpet of wild-flowers, the singing of the robin and the sky-lark, and the familiar haunts of the cuckoo.

Yes, Rachael Manning remembered her childhood days, and how she gathered the cowslip and buttercup in the meadows, and the violets on the hedge-row banks; how she played on the newly mown grass in the hayfields, amusing herself making ornaments of the various grasses. How happy were those days!

She remembered in her girlhood chanting the refrain—

" Cuckoo sings in April,
Cuckoo sings in May,
Cuckoo sings in June,
And in July she flies away."

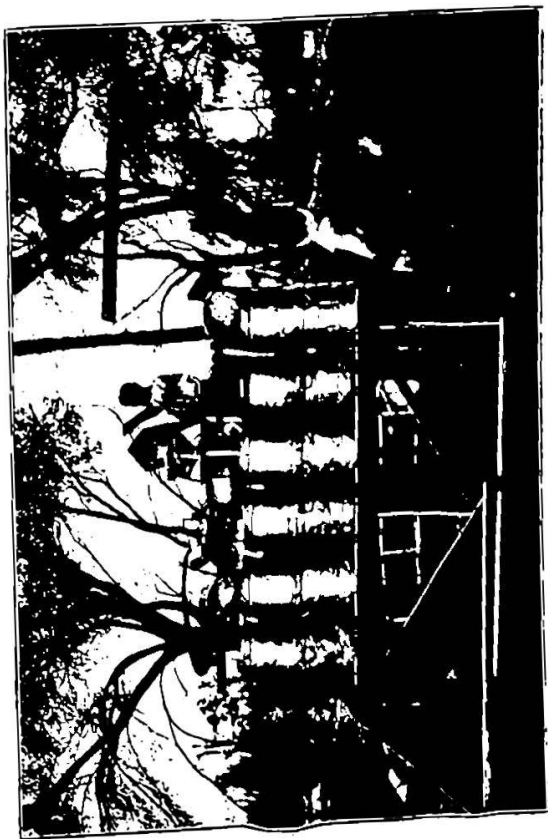
She remembered, too, the autumn, with its well-laden orchards, and the gathering of the golden grain. Would she ever forget the " Harvest Home " rides? Then there was the skating and sliding in the winter. The village life, with its simplicity, all came back to her. The little parish church and the chapel, the village green, the day school, the old schoolmaster, and how, as a mischievous girl, she was one who locked the master out! Yes, she would ever recollect " Locking Out " day, and the punishment meted out on that occasion.

She was then a bright, ruddy, lively girl, and when George Messenger crossed her path, having promised her all sorts of luxuries if she would become his wife, she at last consented.

The two became one, found their way to London, and not finding the fortune which her husband dazzled before her, graduated to the East End. The change from the country, with its pure air and pleasant surroundings, soon proved to her that Cowper was right, and—

" That God made the country
But man made the town."

Temptations abounded. A public-house bar at the corner of the street proved too big an obstacle to



"Bless ya, he's got three hundred acres and milks fifty
cows."



George, and his frequent visits soon affected the home life, and no one felt it more than Rachael.

George intended to be good to her, but drink drowned his intentions. Just at this juncture our hero was born, and started in life designated "Ralph Bright," after England's famous divine and statesman.

By dint of hard work and much self-denial on the part of his mother, Ralph was given a chance to attend a school, which had been provided by specially interested mission friends in the neighbourhood. Between times he sold papers, and thereby earned a few coppers. His schooling over, to the delight of his mother, he secured a position in the firm of John McGregor & Co., ironfounders, as errand boy. His willingness soon won for him the esteem of his employers, and they decided to teach him the trade.

Just as he had made a good start, his mother, who had been failing for some time, was taken seriously ill, and gradually grew weaker. The doctor said her case was hopeless, and in spite of medical skill, she passed away. During a short period of consciousness she had called the lad to her side, and said, "Ralph, be a good boy." This last message proved to be an inspiration, and through the shadows they were riveted on his memory. He thought of it all now, as he sat in the prison cell.

Who had done it? and the question was answered, "An enemy hath done this." But why? How glad he was that his mother was laid to rest! Would his father care? He was afraid not.

George Messenger had gone under, and seemingly had ceased to care for his wife, for he had cast aside his marriage vows, and Rachael had died of a broken heart. The pure blossom from the country could not bloom amidst mortar and bricks in an East End alley. Transplanted, she now rests—

"Where Everlasting Spring abides
And never withering flowers."

Like a brave lad he put his hand to the plough, and gradually became more and more efficient. John

McGregor & Co. were not slow to recognise his good work, and by means of night classes, and direct reading, he rapidly won his way into the firm's favour.

His time of apprenticeship was soon over, and he was trusted with the keys, and made responsible for the opening and closing of the works.

His ideals were shattered. Was this to be the end of his industry—in a prison cell? What could it all mean?

While he was musing, he was aroused by the stentorian voice of the officer in charge, who informed him that he was to be brought before the magistrate at once, when his case would be investigated.

The Court-house was crowded, and the case awakened considerable interest.

Magistrate Fletcher took his seat.

"The Court is now open for business," cried the clerk.

"Ralph Messenger! You are charged with wilfully and feloniously setting fire to the premises of your employers, Messrs. John McGregor & Co., and, further, with forging a cheque on the same firm. What do you plead?"

"Not guilty, your Worship."

The charge came like a thunder-bolt. Witness after witness gave evidence.

Ralph reserved his defence, and was committed for trial at the next Criminal Sessions.

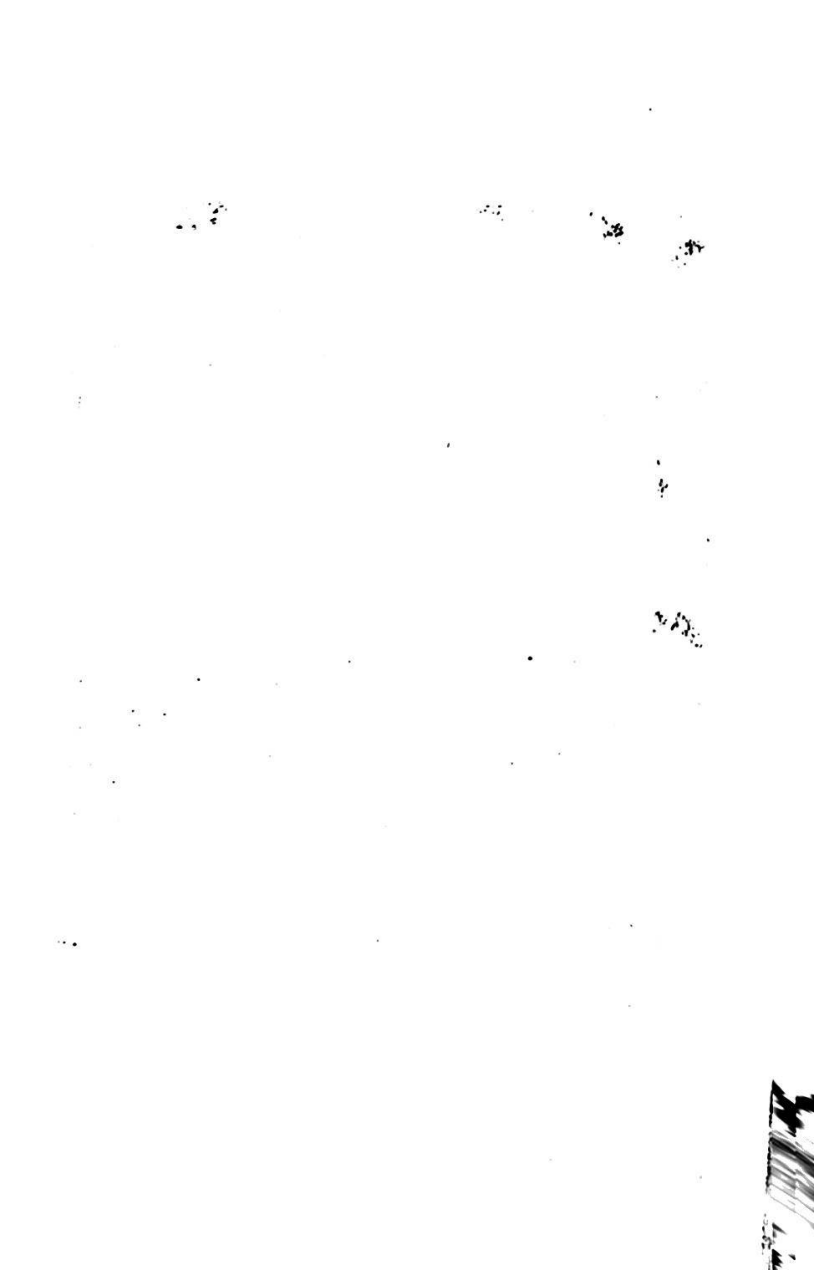
Was it a dream, or a horrible nightmare? Who could be got to defend him? His employer had spoken favourably as regards character and ability, but the circumstantial evidence seemed conclusive. It was proved that he was the last person seen on the premises, and that he carried the keys. Yes, the circumstantial evidence and the finger-prints were strongly against him.

The Supreme Court Session was to open in a week, so he had not long to wait, and was remanded and sent back to his cell, bail having been refused.

Would the week never pass away? . . . In due time the session opened, and great interest was centred in Ralph's case.



The Hon. Morton-King opened the bridge amidst great rejoicing.



The evidence produced in the lower Court was given, if anything, in a fuller degree in the higher.

"Ralph Messenger, what have you to say to the charges?"

"Not guilty, your Worship. I admit the evidence looks black against me, but I believe I am the victim of a preconcerted plot, which I am at present unable to unravel. I admit I returned to the works to attend to a little matter of business, but this was my only reason for returning, and to secure my overcoat, which I had left, and had need of. As regards the attempt to burn down the premises, is it likely that I should do such a thing, especially when my employers have been so generously disposed towards me? There may be incendiarism, as the saturated rags and kerosened material suggests; but I am innocent.

"In reference to the forged cheque. I cannot explain how it was done, or who did it, but God is my witness that I know nothing about it. Experts may be convinced that the signature is mine, but it is inexplicable, as far as I am concerned. I sincerely trust the time will come when my name will be cleared from the stain supposed to be now resting upon it. I am innocent of the charge, your Honour. That is all I have to say."

The Judge reviewed the evidence and addressed the jury, who retired, and in due course returned with a verdict of "Guilty," according to the weight of evidence, but strongly recommended the prisoner to be placed on probation for two years.

"Ralph Messenger, you are discharged from custody, but you are bound over, on account of your previous good conduct and character, to report yourself at intervals to the authorities."

Ralph Messenger stepped out into the world like one dazed.

The trial had been a lengthy one, and extended into the night. Depressed and cast down, Ralph walked along. The world seemed different, and his sensitive nature caused him to believe, and think, that people recognised him as a gaol-bird. What would be the end of it all?

All alone was he. Who cared ? Should Father Thames hide his secret ? Would he be missed if the dark waters opened to receive him ? Just a splash, and it would be all over.

"Are you too, heavy laden ? Come, sinner, come !
Jesus will bear your burden, Come, sinner, come !
Jesus will not deceive you, Come, sinner, come !
Jesus will now receive you, Come, sinner, come."

The singing of the above by a band of open-air workers aroused him.

"Are you too, heavy laden ? Come, sinner, come !"
Surely they knew all about him ?

"Jesus will bear your burden,
Come, and receive the blessing "

The singing stopped, and a big burly man commenced to speak. Ralph Messenger drew near to the outskirts of the crowd.

"Who is the speaker ? " Ralph asked of a man.

"Oh ! That's a religious bloke named Thompson—Peter Thompson. Draws an enormous crowd, and does an immense amount of good, he does. Runs a Mission amongst the slum people."

"Grand bloke is Peter. He helps a chap in time of need, he does. Stranger here ? Not heard of him ? "

"Anniversary Meeting in the Mission Hall to-night. Yer ought to hear him, and the singing. Why, it's like a bit of Heaven let down amongst us."

Ralph waited until the crowd began to move, and gradually followed until he found himself inside the building. Its warmth, hearty singing, and surroundings visibly impressed him.

Peter Thompson believed in looking after the needs of the body first, and a good hot cup of coffee was soon handed round ere the meeting closed.

"Everybody come on Sunday," cried the Missioner.
"Good-night, men and women."

Ralph felt cheered in his loneliness. There was something about the Mission that appealed to him. Even the man at the door noticed him.



The Right Hon. the Premier was invited to perform the ceremony.



"Come again, mate. Glad to see ye."

A cheap lodging-house sheltered him from the outside world that night. Saturday was a long, dreary day to him. How he longed for the Sunday to come, so that he might attend the Mission Hall services again!

The eventful evening arrived, and once more he followed the crowd to the Mission Hall, and listened with growing interest as the Missioner spoke—

"He has a message for you. He was tempted in all points, yet without sin, and He, being tempted, is able to succour those who are tempted. Men," cried the Missioner, "put your burdens on His back. Do it now. Do it now."

"I will, God helping me,
I will be wholly Thine."

sang the Mission choir.

Ralph Messenger went out of the Mission Hall that night a changed man. The broken piece of earthenware had been made whole.

Ralph had put his hand into the hand of the World's Redeemer, and henceforth he intended to put his feet in the foot-prints of the Man of Galilee, who was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. He had seen a new life made possible. He had become a new creation. The scales had fallen from his eyes. The Light of the World had turned on His search-light. Ralph Messenger saw its illumination, and fascinated and charmed by the purity and grandeur of such a revelation, stepped into the night a new man. He made up his mind that he would steer a straight course. Two years of probation. He would prove himself a man of mettle. The first thing he must do was to obtain employment. He could not live on the air.

He was out of employment. He could not go back to John McGregor & Co. No! He would not go near them until his character had been vindicated. But what could he do? He knew that while London, the capital of the British Empire, was the largest, wealthiest, and the most populous town, or rather collection

of towns, under the sun, yet to rank amongst its unemployed, especially after coming out of gaol, was a most serious matter. Yet he was innocent, but as yet unable to prove it.

One night, as he was passing along to his lodgings, he overheard two men talking.

"He's a fine chap, he is. Worth hearing. He's come all the way from New Zealand."

"Who?"

"A great Temperance bloke. Crowds go to hear him."

"What's his name?"

"Caverhill—Rev. Miles Standish Caverhill."

"Got a great story to tell. One of the founders of the Prohibition Movement in that country. No one like him since the days of J. B. Gough. In addition to lecturing on Temperance Reform he speaks on the 'Land of the Moa,' the land of freedom and equality."

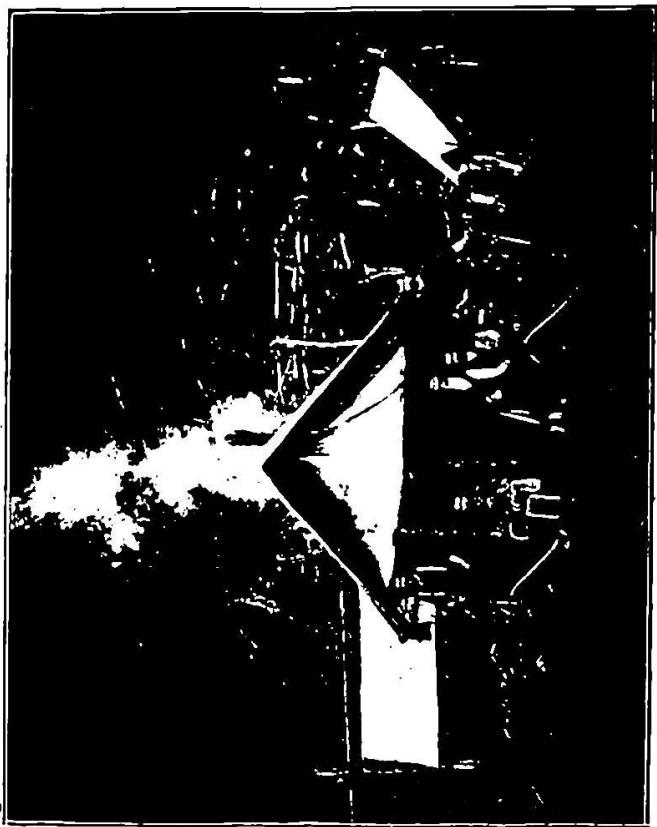
As a result of this conversation Ralph went and heard this visitor from the Antipodes, and decided that as soon as his probation was over he would emigrate. He would go abroad. A long talk with the Rev. Peter Thompson, to whom he had told all his troubles, and who gave friendly advice during his period of probation, convinced him of the wisdom of his intention. By doing odd jobs he was able to eke out an existence.

Thanks to the genial Missioner's help and cheer, and the work found for him in the Mission, the two years of probation passed by, and he was free again. Free to put the resolve he had made to go abroad into practice.

How was it to be done? The unexpected happened and the way opened. One morning, as he was walking along by the London Docks, he read on a notice-board—

"Wanted at once, a fireman. Apply office of the Shaw, Savill & Albion Co. To sail this day at 2-30 p.m."

His application was granted, and at the appointed time he was at his post.



The shades of evening were fast falling by the time
Ralph had erected his "Calico House."







There is an art in handling the "navvies pick and shovel."

CHAPTER II

OVER THE ROLLING SEA

"A life on the ocean wave,
And a home on the rolling deep,
Where the scattered waters rave,
And the winds their watches keep."
—Old Song.

ALL around was life and excitement. The wharves were thronged with workmen pouring cargo into the hold of the great liner. It seemed as if it were impossible to satisfy the great storing capacity of the huge steamer.

"Make ready for His Majesty's mail."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The steam winch continued its rattle and whirr as it heaved and lowered its numerous packages.

"Let go!"

The visitors' warning to depart bell rang loud and clear, and in these remaining moments farewells were said, families parted, and friendships severed.

"All visitors ashore! Clear the gangway! Let go the shore-lines!"

This was quickly done.

"A good trip, Captain," shouted the Company's representative. . . .

She was soon away from the wharf, carrying amongst her human freight those who were destined to make history on behalf of the British Empire. These were gathered from all parts of the United Kingdom, all bent upon making a fortune in a new land.

Father Thames was in his best mood as the steamer moved along. What memories linger around this majestic river, comparatively small, yet one of the most famous waterways in the world! Deep and wide at its mouth, permitting large ocean-going steamers to sail or travel for sixty miles right up to its docks.

The Britisher cannot help feeling a thrill of pride when he is told no port in ancient or modern times has ever equalled London in the number of ships that visit it.

The sixty miles of smooth water enabled the passengers to get accustomed to their new surroundings, as well as to do something towards straightening their cabins ere rougher water is reached.

Harry Champness remained on deck. He had left a thickly populated manufacturing town in Lancashire. For eight years he worked in one of the cotton mills, and had just managed to eke out an existence, being no better off than at the beginning. His wife had done what she could, but there was no prospect of better things. Week after week passed, and they discussed the situation. The only ray of hope seemed to be in getting away from such conditions. The only way was to emigrate.

Having communicated with and interviewed the High Commissioner for New Zealand, the way was made plain, and the road clear, so, with their little daughter, they sold their few belongings, left their native town, and were now travelling to the unknown.

"Look a bit sad, mate. Cheer up! Thou'll soon get over it. Best thing ever did. Good thing to cut the painter while you're young."

Jacob Chambers, who volunteered these words of cheer, had left the struggles on a Lincolnshire farm, and was looking forward to his land of Canaan by going across the sea.

"Twelve shillings a week to keep a wife and family on—not good enough. Wean't keep body and soul together. Missus and me couldn't stand it any longer. Lived on 'dry bread and pull it' long enough. What are you going to do, mate, when ye get there?"

"Anything that turns up," Harry Champness replied.

"Grand country. Jack Stubbins came home last year quite a gentleman. Why, he even brought his wife with him—scarcely knew them. Got a farm out there. Done splendid! Why, if he had stayed at home

he'd only been able to get six feet in the churchyard when he died. Bless ye! He's got three hundred acres, and milks fifty cows, and done well, besides raising lots of pigs and several tons of honey per year."

"Several tons of honey? Impossible."

"Fact! They had a real good time. Meant hard work, but he now drives in a buggy. Never got such a thing in England. He said, New Zealand's the place for a working man who is not afraid of hard work for a start, and wants to get on. So I says to my wife one night: 'Sally, what do you think about it?' She says: 'Jacob, I'll follow thee to the ends of the earth. We can't be worse off than we are here.' So I gives the maister notice, and he stands bolt upright. 'Yes, maister, I'm going to leave you. I'm going to a place called New Zealand.' 'You foolish man! Why, you'll never get there. Stop here and work, like your father, grandfather, and great-grandfather before you.' 'Noa, thank ye. Sorry, but my mind is made up. John Jobson, the tailor, has got ma papers for me, and he knows several who are doing well out there. Can't turn back now.'"

Harry Champness listened with great eagerness. He was glad to find one who was in the same position as himself.

Wider and wider the river opened, and the English Channel loomed in view.

"We're going to have dirty weather, Bos'un," said the Captain, as he went on to the bridge. "See that everything is secured, and arrange for a good look-out to be kept."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The shades of evening were falling fast, and darkness soon hid the land from view. They had passed the white cliffs of Dover on the right, and the Channel Islands on the left. The ringing of the tea-bell caused Harry and Jacob to go below, where they soon found their work cut out. Happily, their cabins were near each other, and they sat at the same table for their meals.

Having fixed up ready for the night, they went on deck together, and walked to and fro, and watched

and talked until late, when they decided to turn in. About an hour after they had retired, they were awakened by a crash like the sound of many cannon. What did it mean?

"Don't be alarmed," shouted the steward. "Dress quietly, in case it is necessary. There has been a collision. We've been run into by another vessel. Job to tell the extent of damage! Carried away the bulwarks of our vessel on the starboard side. Happily, no lives lost. Shall have to put into Southampton for repairs. Might have been worse, but for the captain's wife, who was travelling on the colliding vessel, and saw the danger in time to prevent striking with her bows, or both of us would have foundered. One of our men showed splendid judgement—a fireman, who saw through the fog the other vessel suddenly right up against us, and sang out in time for the officer in charge to have her set full speed astern. A brave deed on the part of the fireman."

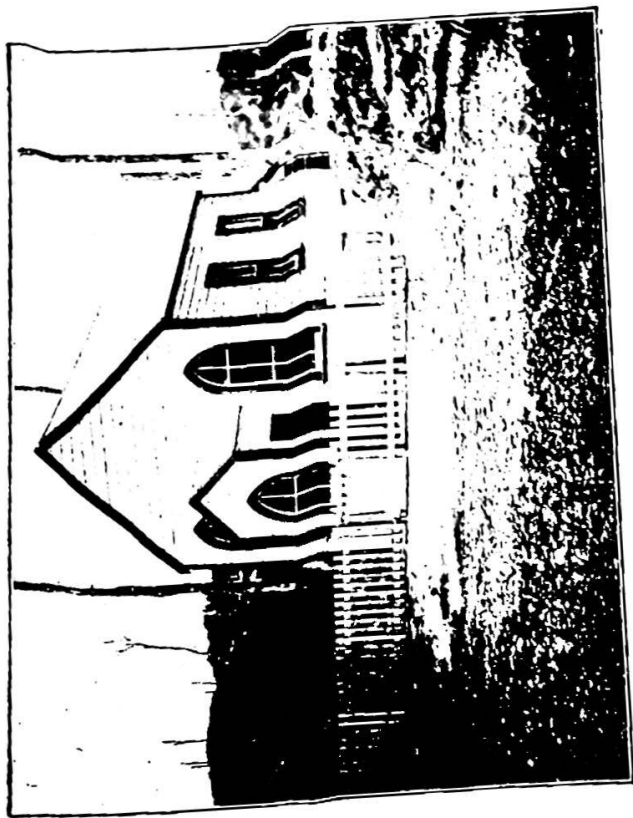
Harry and Jacob rushed on deck as quickly as possible, to see if they could render any assistance. Finding nothing further could be done, they retired once more; meanwhile, the *Rinthic* headed for Southampton to gather up further passengers and to get repaired. On examination it was found very little delay would be experienced on account of repairs.

Once more a start was made. The weather in the Channel was rough and boisterous, and its effect on many of the passengers was apparent. Stanley Chambers was one of the first to perform.

"That's right," said Jacob. "Chuck it up, lad. Thou'llt be all the better for it."

Men and women lay moaning and groaning in all directions, vowing that they would never have come aboard if they had known, and did not mind what happened. The Chambers and Champness families were no exception.

Sunday dawned raw and desolate. How different! No church bell in the steeple calling them to worship. Nothing but the grey clouds and angry wind whistling through the rigging.



The building was not of an ornate character, but it was
God's house.

" Dirty weather," said a sailor, as he passed, clad in heavy sou'-wester and oilskins.

Harry and Jacob had arrived on deck soon after breakfast. Both had been local preachers in connection with the Methodist Church, and this morning they thought of the chapels in which they worshipped. In imagination they could hear and see the congregation singing and praying for them in that well-known mariner's hymn—

" Eternal Father ! Strong to save,
Whose arm doth bind the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep ;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea ! "

It was impossible to hold service on board, for the simple reason that too many were unbalanced by *mal de mer*.

Crossing the Bay of Biscay and coasting the shores of Portugal and Spain, they soon hoped to reach and pass the embattered rock of Gibraltar, the key of the Mediterranean. Brighter days were in store as the *Rinthic* travelled along the Levant, and places of interest to every patriotic Britisher were pointed out. First and foremost was Gibraltar, practically impregnable, our possession for over two hundred years, the first of the great fortresses which guard the road to India. Halfway along the Mediterranean we reach the second of Britain's strongholds on the highway to the East—the island of Malta, the headquarters of the Mediterranean fleet. Then, between Malta and the Mediterranean end of the Suez Canal, lies another naval outpost—the large British island of Cyprus.

All these places were of intense interest to Harry and Jacob, especially the passage of the vessel through the Suez Canal, for they realised that they were in Egyptian territory, and that Egypt was practically British. They were told that they could travel from Cairo to Lake Victoria Nyanza, a direct distance of more than two thousand miles, and be under the Union

Jack all the way. Sailing through the Red Sea, Britain has two sentinels to watch this gate to the Indian Ocean—the powerful fortress of Aden, situated on a volcanic peninsula of Arabia; and the rocky little island of Perim, which lies in the narrowest part of the strait. All these historic spots were particularly interesting to the travellers, although the weather was exceedingly hot while passing through the tropics.

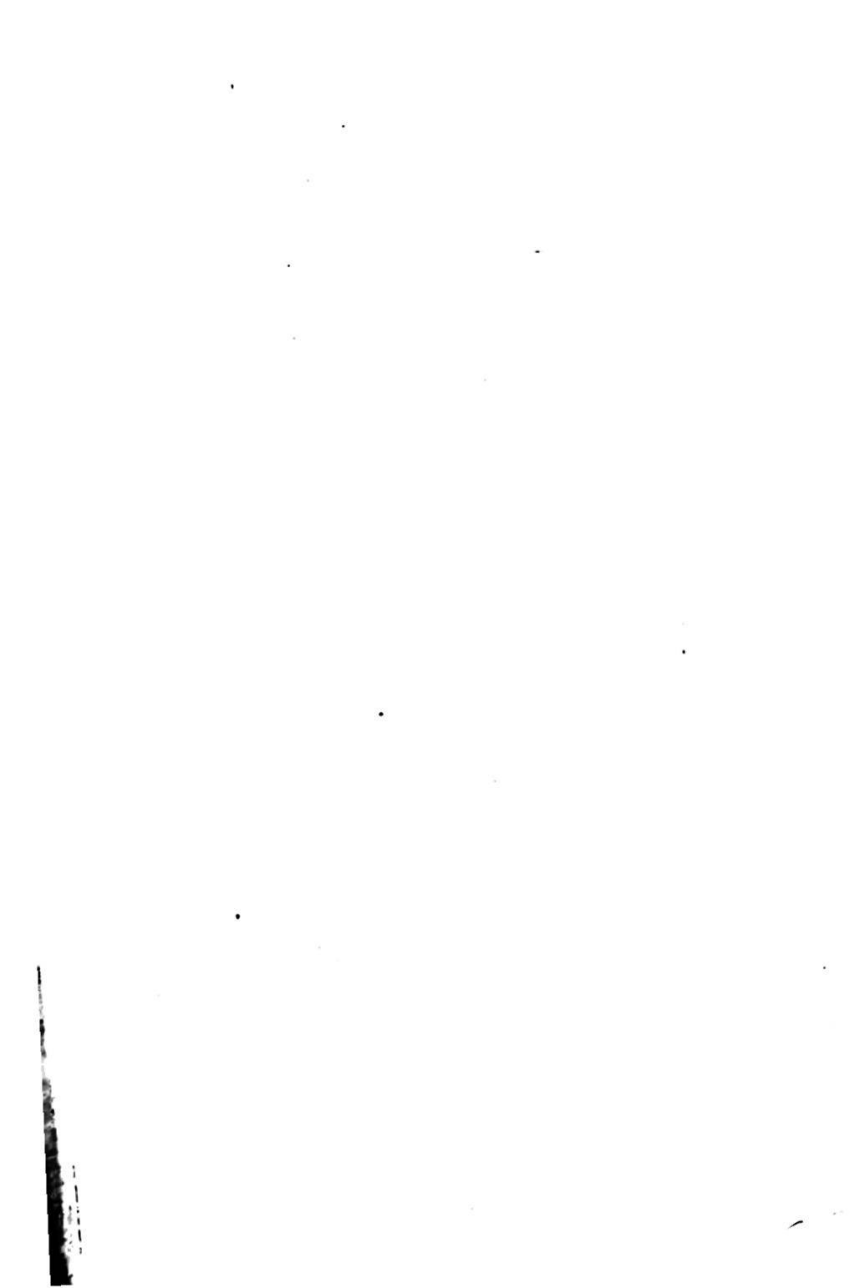
The coming aboard of Father Neptune while crossing the line proved most entertaining, as did the stopping at the various ports of call on the way. Several thousands of miles had to be travelled in crossing the Indian Ocean. Away from the sight of land, the journey now became somewhat monotonous, but was considerably relieved by games of various kinds provided on deck, when the weather was fine enough.

Jacob was passionately fond of poetry, and the great expanse day after day brought to his mind the words of Byron—

“Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty’s form
Glasses itself in tempests; in all time—
Calm or convulsed—in breeze, or gale, or storm,
Icing the pole, or the torrid clime,
Dark-heaving—boundless, endless, and sublime—
The image of Eternity—the throne
Of th’ Invisible; even from out thy slime
The monsters of the deep are made; each zone
Obeys thee; thou goest forth, dread, fathomless, alone.”

These words, from his poem on “The Ocean,” flooded Jacob’s mind as he looked out day after day on the vast and boundless watery expanse.

On Sundays, Harry and Jacob took it alternately to conduct service on the deck, assisted by John Stubberfield, a saloon passenger, while Laura, his daughter, sometimes sang a solo. Some of the careless and indifferent jeered, and even threw potatoes at the speakers, until the Captain put a stop to such interruptions. A Sunday School was started, and conducted in the second saloon, for the boys and the girls each Sunday, and John Stubberfield offered





He decided to make "Crowley Camp" his Headquarters.

prizes for Bible essays. Sam Chambers, Jacob's second son, succeeded in winning the first prize on the boys' side, which was suitably inscribed, bearing the name of the SS. *Rinthic*, the locality, as well as the date of presentation, which all added interest and value to such a reward.

Heavy clouds appeared in the distance, and indicated that a storm was brewing. The wind began to rattle fiercely through the rigging. All hands were ordered to make everything fast in readiness. Passengers were ordered below, as huge waves, mountains high, began to roll over the deck.

"Batten down the hatchways! Don't let any passengers come on deck," cries the Captain. "Increase your look-out by putting a man on the bow of the ship, another halfway to the bridge, to shout the messages to the officer on duty there."

A storm at sea is an awful sight. For three days and nights no one was allowed on deck, except those in charge of the ship. On the third day, grave doubts were expressed as to whether the ship would weather the hurricane. Scoffers and card-players and their parties, with the drinking fraternity, now became anxious to join those at prayer—

"For with Christ in the vessel
They could smile at the storm."

Gradually the storm began to abate, and it was discovered that they had narrowly escaped. Part of the bulwarks had been smashed to atoms. Pig pens and pigs, cattle pens and cattle, had all been swept into the mighty deep, while Pat O'Reilly, the merry man of the crew, had nearly found a watery grave, being washed into the sea by the force of a tremendous wave which swept the deck, but happily he was brought back by a receding wave.

"It was a near shave! Bejabbers, I thought me time had come, and that the last of me would never be seen again, again. Saints be praised, I came back again, and faith, it's a better man Pat O'Reilly meant to be."

On the fourth day, as Harry was standing near the engine-room deck, getting a little warmth, his attention was drawn to a sailor, who, to obey an order, ran quickly up the rigging to make something fast. It was a dangerous piece of work at any time, but the state of the weather made it doubly so.

The poor fellow slipped, and Harry was horror-stricken to see the man fall from the high altitude into the raging sea.

"Man Overboard! Man Overboard! Stop her engines!"

Life-buoys were thrown from the bridge, then from the stern of the vessel.

"Get out the boat."

In the space of a few seconds the men were in their places, in charge of the third officer, and lowered over the side. The boat was launched, and eight brave men pulled away to the rescue of their drowning comrade. Hundreds of the passengers watched the boat with intense interest.

"Turn the vessel round," cried the captain, as he stamped his foot in intense excitement. "Follow the boat! We shall lose all our best men!"

His language was of the superlative degree and forceful, with adjectives red-hot from the swearer's anvil to make them unprintable.

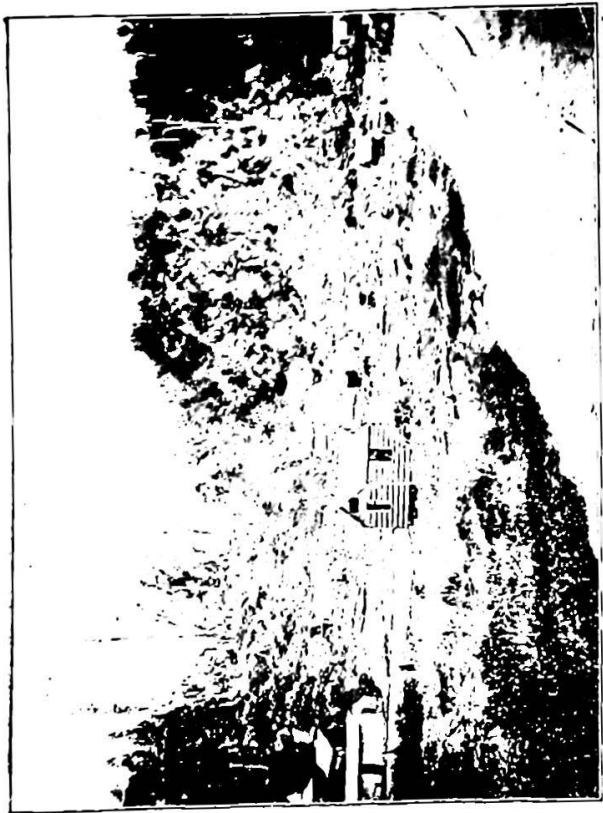
The boat had been away about an hour.

"Signal for them to return," cried Captain Carey. "Put nine ropes over the ship's side in readiness, one rope for each man to grip when the boat comes alongside, as it will otherwise be smashed to pieces, or swamped. Here they come! Give them a British cheer."

Loud and long cheers came from hundreds of throats. "They have got him!" "Hurrah!" Again "Hurrah!"

"Passengers, every man to the ropes. Ready!" Each man gripped his rope. "Pull, boys, pull! There is not a moment to lose."

Barely had they gripped the rope when the frail craft was crashed to matchwood and floated away on the



There were now many hundreds of men living under
canyas.

stormy sea. All were safely dragged on board and heartily welcomed for their bravery, when it was discovered that one was not, for they were unable to save their comrade, although they had made such a brave and noble attempt.

Frank Markham was a good swimmer, but was either seized with cramp or dragged down by his heavy sea-boots, and in this way one of Britain's true sailors found a watery grave, like many others who do business on deep waters, and who go down to the sea in ships.

This event cast quite a gloom over all on board, and a subdued feeling took possession of all concerned.

One of their number had gone.

True bravery is always admired, and appeals to every real man or woman. It was so in this case, and a subscription list was opened, with a view to recognising in a tangible manner the heroism of brave men.

On the following Sunday morning, all were invited to attend a "Thanksgiving Service" on the saloon deck, when, in addition, those interested asked the Captain to read an address of appreciation, a copy of which was handed to each man, also an order on the owners to hand to the men, on their return to London, "Eight pounds to the third officer, who was in charge of the boat, and to each of the seamen six pounds," with which to buy something tangible as a memento.

Things settled down soon after to the normal for a week or so, when it was announced that the Captain and officers were to give a Sunday School treat to all the children aboard before the voyage was completed.

The eventful day arrived. Special tables were tastefully laid in the second saloon. What a time they had! especially the third-class children! Sam Chambers did his duty with the rest, and not only stowed it away inside in extraordinary quantities, but also filled his overcoat pocket, which he had on for the occasion. A great time was experienced, and is remembered to this day by many who participated in it. Harry, Jacob, and John Stubberfield all did their part to make the event memorable.

CHAPTER III

AN UNSOUGHT BILLET

" Just where you stand in the conflict,
There is your place ;
Just where you think you are useless,
Hide not your face.
God placed you there for a purpose,
Whate'er it may be,
Think He has chosen you for it,
And work loyally."

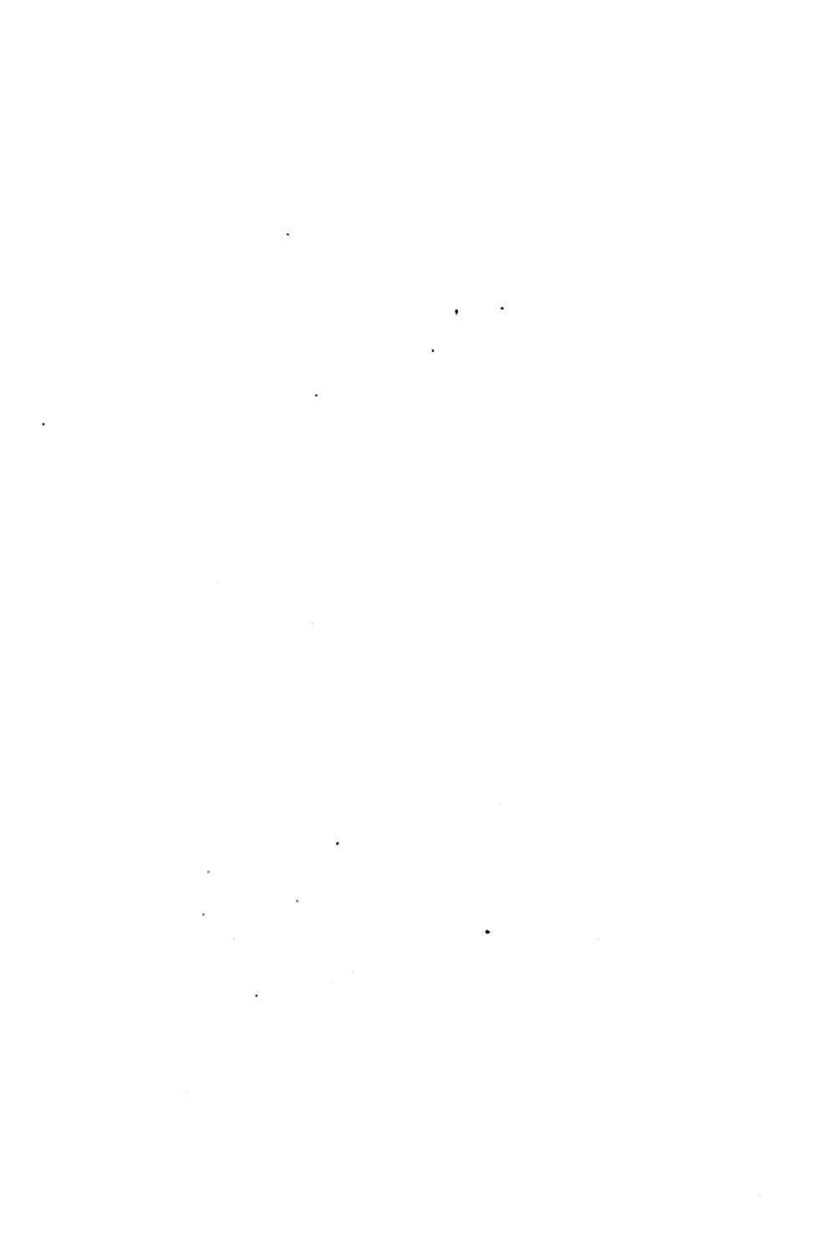
THE SS. *Rinthic* was ploughing her way across the Pacific Ocean. The water was as calm as a mill-pond, and there was no sign of life, except a stray seagull, lazily on the wing, or an albatross, gracefully flitting over the wide, azure main.

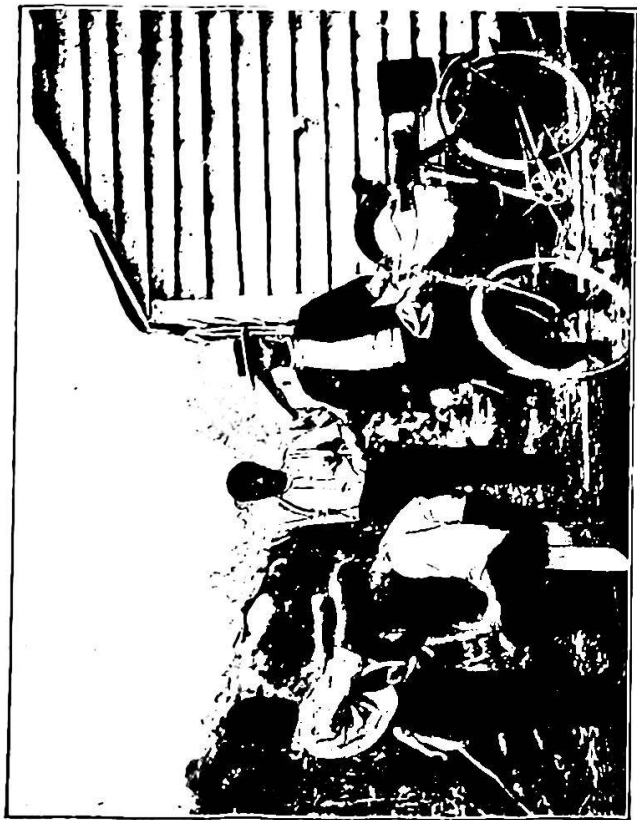
The silence was only broken by the thud, thud, thud of the powerful engines, which kept up the monotonous sound day and night. Lounging on the foc's'le-deck was a young fireman. He was deep in thought. Two expressions haunted him : " Arrested " and " Two Years' Probation." Yet he was innocent. Would he ever be able to prove it, and vindicate and clear his character ?

All the past came back to him like a dream. Arousing himself, he stamped his foot, and resolved that he would leave no stone unturned. In the meantime, he would let the past bury itself.

Time sped along, and the sixteen thousand miles journey was nearly completed. A few more shifts below, and his uncongenial work would be over.

Ralph Messenger went on duty as soon as he got on board at the London Docks. He found the work in the stokehold, shovelling coal, hard and distasteful, but he was determined to make the best of it.





The Temperance Bloke arrives.

He was bound for the Land of Canaan, although in a peculiar capacity. The grimy nature of his work made it impossible for him to associate himself with anything to his liking, but on Sundays he had always listened to the speakers and taken part in the singing on the outskirts. He had also been one of the eight men to man the boat to try and rescue Frank Markham. Would he ever forget it? No! Never! But he would soon be out of bondage. Only ten more days. So far they had had an eventful trip.

"Sail-O! Sail-O!"

The vessel came nearer and nearer, and wished to communicate.

"The *Ikato* is missing between Sydney and New Zealand. Feared she has broken down. All steamers bound to that Colony are requested to keep a particularly sharp look-out, and zigzag the route usually taken."

Having delivered her message, she steamed away, and was soon out of sight. This proved a means of diversion, and for days the officers and crew were alert, and swept the horizon again and again with their telescopes. Ultimately the vessel was seen drifting. Her tail-shaft broken, and at the mercy of the sea—helpless. They were in great distress, provisions were running short. They had tried to fix it up, but the difficulties were too great. A boat was soon lowered, and provisions and water were sent.

The men and passengers on the *Ikato* were overjoyed, and embraced their rescuers and thanked God for their deliverance.

"We had begun to think we should never be discovered, and just when we were wondering what was to be our end, drowning, or starvation, you hove in sight!"

Tow-lines were fixed to the *Ikato*, and the *Rinthic* commenced to tow the disabled vessel to the nearest port for repairs. This meant calling in at Sydney. However, there was nothing but to do as the old woman said, "Grin and bear it."

Having landed the *Ikato* safely in port, the *Rinthic*

resumed her journey. Three more days, and she was due in Wellington. But the unexpected often happens, and it did so in this case. Ominous whispers were heard in certain quarters, and these whispered rumours spread.

A steerage passenger named Frank Templeton had been taken ill, and had all the symptoms of small-pox.

The rumour was soon confirmed, and great activity was displayed on the fore-part of the ship. The patient must be isolated. To enable this to be done, a bullock-pen was hastily fitted up in readiness for the supposed small-pox patient. It had been washed, and made as comfortable as possible. Now it must be placed in position.

"Heave away!"

"Look out, Bosun."

The warning came not a minute too soon, for the pen swung, and knocked the boatswain overboard. Happily, he had the presence of mind to catch hold of one of the ropes around the pen, and clung to it, and was ultimately landed safely, with the building. His presence of mind had saved him. For this splendid bit of work he was heartily cheered.

Who was to be placed in charge of the patient?

A man was needed from the ship's company. Ralph Messenger was the only one who had not signed on for the return trip to London. Who would volunteer to act as nurse and attendant? A man was needed who could be left behind. So an unexpected billet was forced upon him, "for duty to one in distress" compelled him to say—

"Here am I, Send me."

This sudden development of things caused consternation aboard, from one end of the vessel to the other, and those on board anxiously waited for further news. Meanwhile, all the passengers were forbidden to approach the isolated area.

In discussing the situation, the doctor said the disease was always transmitted from one person to another, and never appeared spontaneously.

"However, until the diagnosis is definite, we will treat the case as infectious."

There is always a great deal of hysteria shown by a section of people when any rumour of a dangerous disease gets abroad, and the use of a little common-sense does not come in amiss even under such circumstances.

In small-pox the rash is invariably at a uniform stage on the face—that is to say, all pox reach the pustular stage at the same time. By the doctor's orders, all the passengers were ordered to muster on deck, and roll up their sleeves and walk past him and the captain in single file, to see if they had been vaccinated.

Jacob Chambers was bitterly opposed to vaccination. He had, he said, seen so many evil results of it, and had lost one child through it. He had been fined several times, to evade it in England, and now he was compelled to bottle up his opinions and be vaccinated, with all his family; for it was compulsory, and not optional. Those who showed marks of having been done were passed; those who had not, underwent the ordeal.

The steamer ploughed her way across the Tasman Sea. Land! Ahoy! Nearer the faint outline loomed up in the distance, and the rugged coastline of the North Island opened out. The Cook Straits, of historic fame, so familiar to those who go down to the sea in ships, were reached.

"Half-an-hour, and we shall sight the Heads, the entrance to Port Nicholson," cried the Captain.

The passengers were all eager to get a good view of what, to many, was to be their new home in a new land. The deck was crowded with sightseers.

The entrance to Wellington Harbour is not of the safest in rough weather, and many a noble mariner has dreaded the rocky coast through which he must pass ere he reaches the haven for which he has been striving. Slowly the engines drove the vessel up the harbour. Her arrival was of unusual interest, for she was flying the yellow flag, which means sickness

aboard, and urgent need of assistance. It was reported in Wellington that the *Rinthic* had small-pox on board.

The Public Health Officer, Dr. Spratt, who had had considerable experience of the complaint in England and South Africa, soon arrived alongside, and ordered the vessel into quarantine until the case was further diagnosed. After careful examination the vessel was ordered to remain isolated for at least three days, and the patient and his attendant were placed on Soames Island in quarantine.

After several days, the medical declaration of the suspicious outbreak was that the patient was found to have chicken-pox, not small-pox, as originally stated, and that he was getting better fast. Considerable public relief was felt, and the *Rinthic* was allowed to land her passengers. A difficulty was experienced with those who had occasion to stay in Wellington. The hotels and boarding houses were loath to give them accommodation. However, as the majority were bound to other parts of the Island, this was soon got over.

Jacob Chambers and Harry Champness decided to keep together, and immediately obtained work in connection with road-making, until something better turned up. When they received their first week's pay they could scarcely believe that they had earned forty-eight shillings each for their work. It was a genuine surprise to them.

"Different from England, mate," said Jacob.

"Why, the man they call the boss treated us like gentlemen. No class distinction. I like the prospects."

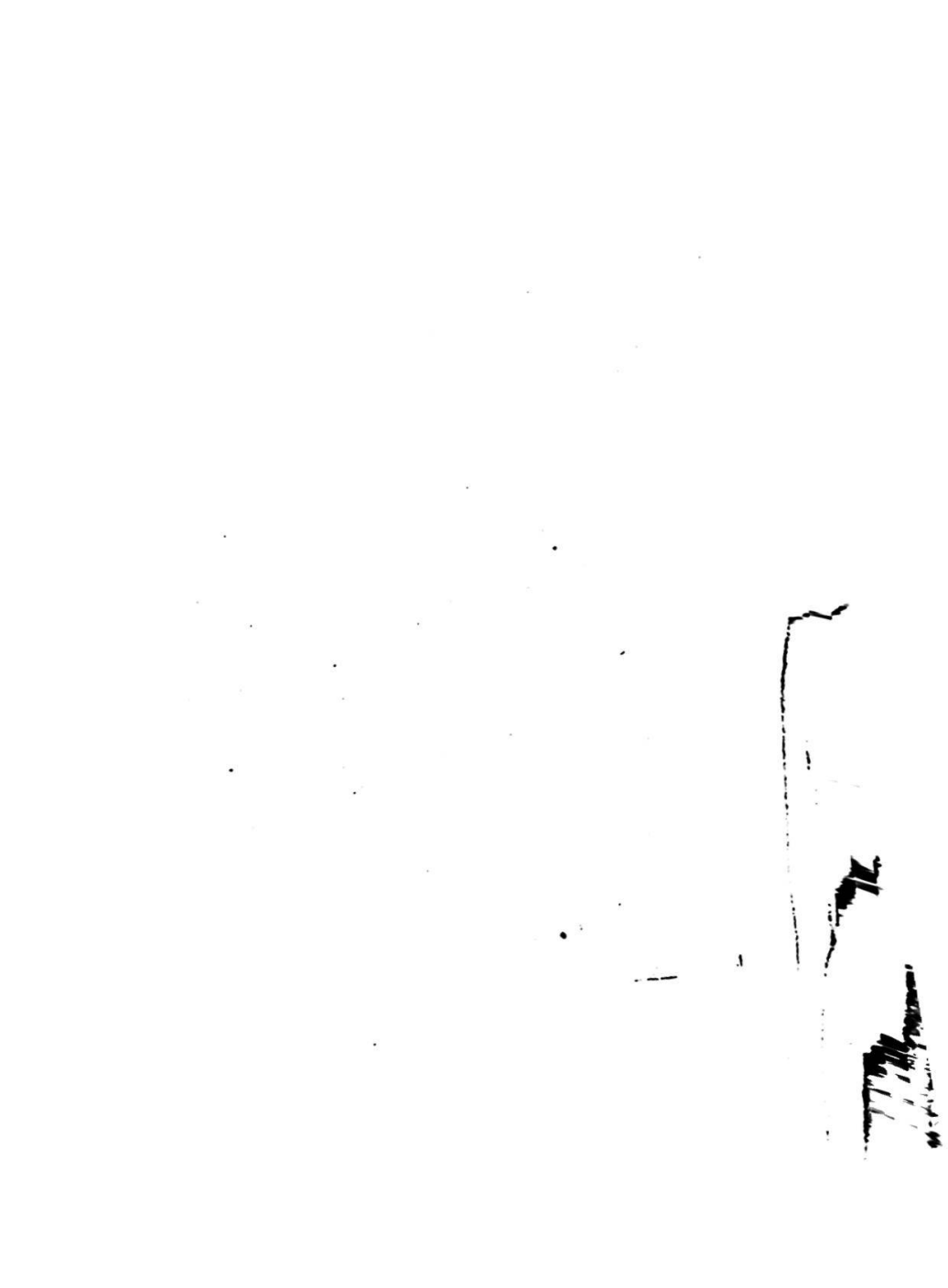
The men separated, and went to their various homes, and delighted their wives with the result of their week's work.

"Forty-eight shillings, wife," said Jacob. "Glad ta came, aren't ta? Worth a bit of sea-sickness to get into such a country as this."

Ralph Messenger and his patient were passing through a different experience. Soames Island, where they were isolated, was the quarantine station for all suspects, or those likely to have disease, who are placed there



The frame-work of a tunnel is most interesting, so are the workers who pierce the mountains.



for a period under medical supervision, to prevent undesirable diseases from being brought into the country.

Ralph and his companion were taken ashore in a pulling-boat, and landing safely at the jetty, were conducted to the hospital on the island. Here they were well looked after, and frequently visited by those in authority. After a fortnight's isolation, news was brought to them that it was safe for them to get a "clean bill," and that they could go ashore, in Wellington, as free men, without any danger of transmitting disease.

Before leaving the island they had a good look round, visiting the lighthouse, which guides and lights the numerous vessels in and out of Wellington Harbour. They had been immensely interested in watching the various shipping craft of all sizes pass in and out, also the railway trains skirting the harbour as they travel into the "Hutt Valley," thence away to any part of the North Island. The picturesque, bush-clad "Rimutaka," and Tararua Ranges were seen in the distance, acting as a background for the lovely vista or panorama. They had already learnt that the climate of New Zealand is temperate and healthy, and that the air is warmer and drier than in Great Britain; further, that on account of its lofty chains of mountains and its insular position, plenty of rain falls during the year. The prevailing winds, being from the north-west, bring abundance of moisture to the forest-clad western shores of the islands.

The time of their departure had at last arrived, and the launch soon landed them on the Wellington Wharf. The launch was alongside the jetty, and in a few minutes they were away. The run down the harbour was both pleasant and interesting, and they soon stood together on the Wellington wharf.

Ralph Messenger's instructions were to proceed to the Shaw, Savill Co.'s office, where he was particularly wanted. The manager called him into his office, and handed him a highly worded letter, conveying the Company's appreciation of his valuable services;

and, in addition to his wages, presented him with a cheque for a substantial amount, together with their best wishes for his future success.

"It affords me much pleasure, also, to hand to you your share of the recognition made on the voyage out, when you, with others, at the call of duty risked your life in the brave attempt to rescue a drowning comrade. The Captain wished me to do it in his stead, as you are remaining in the Dominion, and therefore cannot receive it in London. I congratulate you, and state that New Zealand is pleased to receive such men as colonists."

Ralph received his pay and commendation, and stepped out of the office, a stranger in a strange country. Happily, for such as he the Salvation Army provide accommodation, and he soon found out the People's Palace, where he was soon made welcome. He decided to stay there for a few days to enable him to look around. Taking up the *Evening Post* on the Saturday, he saw the following advertisement—

Y.M.C.A.

MEN'S OWN at 4 p.m.

Address by MR. JAMIESON, the National
General Secretary for New Zealand.

Subject: "Your Next Move."

Strangers' Tea at the close. All young
Men Invited.

His attention was arrested. He had wondered how he should spend his Sunday. "Your Next Move." This was surely a message for him! He would go.

Promptly at four o'clock Ralph Messenger found himself in the finely equipped Lecture Hall of the Wellington Y.M.C.A., seated amongst about one hundred and fifty young men. Punctually to time the chairman opened the proceedings. The singing of—

"Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eves:
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves"



Railway Construction is not an easy job.



especially gripped his attention, as did the prayer and Scripture reading. The National Secretary, Mr. Jamieson, was then asked to address the meeting.

He soon made himself at home with the young men, and proved himself to be a real "young men's" man. He commenced by quoting the words of Buxton: "The longer I live, the more I am certain that the great difference between men—between the feeble and the powerful, the great and the insignificant—is earnestness, invincible determination; a purpose once fixed, and then, death or victory." This, he said, was the spirit of Mr. (now) Sir George Williams, and those who founded the movement. He then took the young fellows back to the condition of apprentices at the time when Mr. Williams and those associated with him founded the first Y.M.C.A., how those with him, determined to be thorough in all they undertook, had impressed on others the importance of being enthusiastic, and doing the work to hand, or that opportunity would be gone for ever. To-day, as a result of the determination and foundation laid by the founders, they had organisations at work in all parts of the world.

The class of work done had commended itself to the Governments of different countries, and, in connection with the construction of the great Panama Canal, they were asked by President Roosevelt to superintend the welfare of the young men engaged there. There is a great work to be done, and it is up to young fellows to do it, he said. You may not be able to do much; but you can all do something. You can smile, or give a hand-shake, a warm hand-grip—no one can estimate the value of it. You can make your influence felt amongst those amongst whom you labour.

"You have a splendid equipment. We have moved, but let me tell you this, men: Bring your conduct in line with the life and character of Jesus Christ. That is the only life worth living. Try it! Emulate it. God bless you fellows. Remember, I have a warm place in my heart for you. It is now 'Your Next Move'

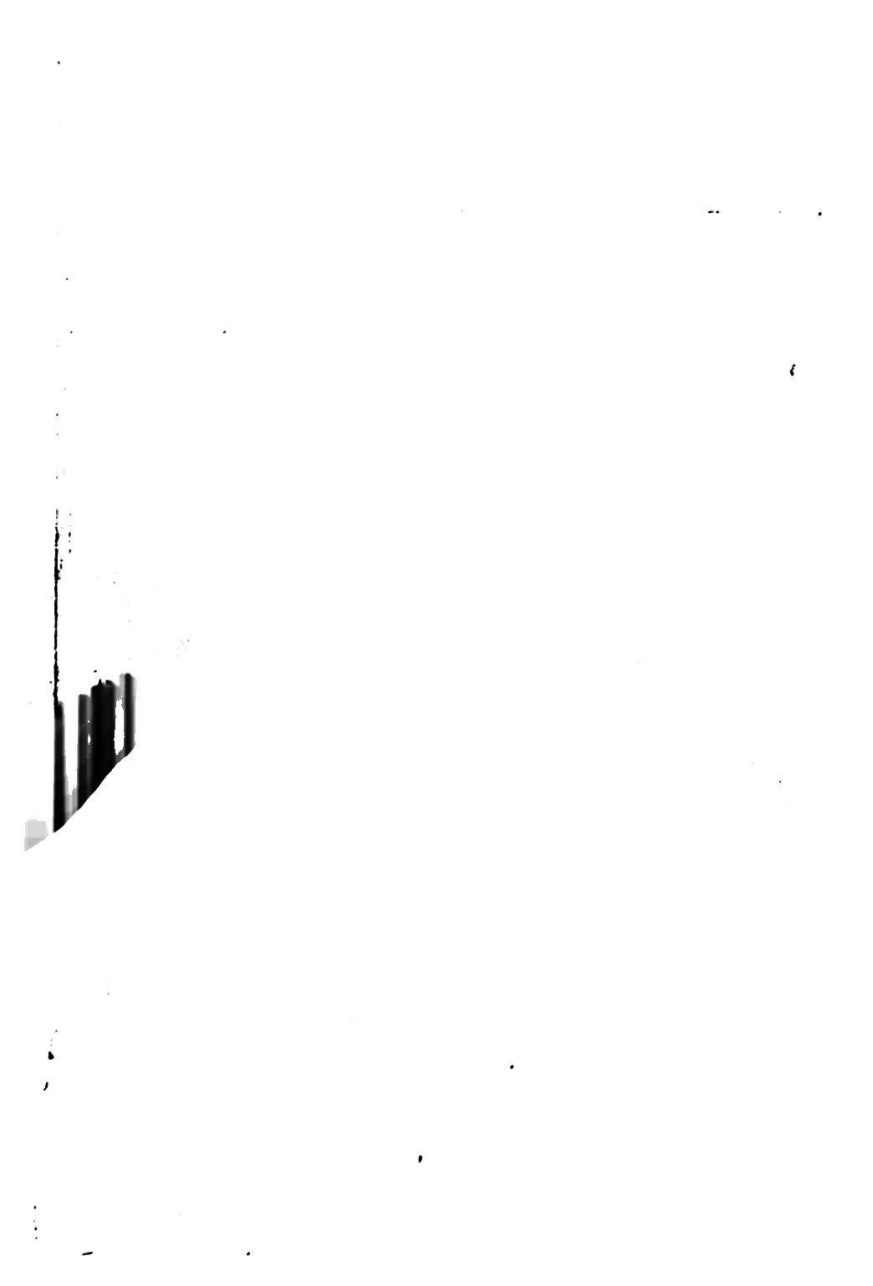
to represent Jesus Christ in every place, and in every department of life—in civic, as well as in commercial affairs of the town. Go at it as if you meant it. Live the Life—the twentieth century demands it. Go nowhere, do nothing, take no part in anything that Jesus Christ would not like to see you take part in. Again I say, this is 'Your Next Move.' "

The speaker sat down. The meeting closed, with further prayer and praise.

The "Strangers' Tea" followed, and Ralph stayed.



It was delightful to have a train service to "Bonser's Camp."



CHAPTER IV

LAND HUNGER

"That day is the best wherein we give
A thought to others' sorrows ;
Forgetting self, we learn to live,
And blessings born of kindly deeds
Make golden our to-morrows."

R. H. THORPE.

HAPPILY for such as Ralph Messenger, the Y.M.C.A. opens wide its doors, and the splendidly equipped institution in Wellington was just the thing for him. The General Secretary, genial to the core, took him in hand, and in a short time he felt perfectly at home.

Some years previous to the opening of our story, there had been a great outcry for land, which resulted in a change of government. On the "Ballance Government" coming into power, one of its first actions was to introduce, through its Minister for Lands, the Hon. John Mackenzie "Lands for Settlement Bill," enabling people who wished to take up land to form themselves into Associations, and to take up land upon which they and their families could settle.

Many of these associations were formed in the South Island, and considerable migrations were the result, giving a great impetus to the settlement of the North Island. In the North, settlement had been much retarded through the "Maori War," want of communication, and the rougher, rugged nature of the country. Honest "Jock" Mackenzie solved the problem, and hundreds of people were helped on to the land who could not have otherwise been tillers of the soil. Several of these associations had their eyes on the thousands of acres of virgin bush-land in the hinterland of Taranaki. Surveyors were sent, even before

the Parliament had risen, to survey these blocks. Into this area came some of the finest men and women of the Dominion. The expenses incurred in taking up the land were reasonable.

The machinery of the Public Trust Office was used extensively to make the administrations of the Act as cheap as possible to members. The Public Trustee provided the funds to pay the purchase money owing by the Association, taking up debentures as security for the advance. Owing to the long term of the debentures, the amount thereof, and the guarantee of the Crown, he was enabled to advance the money at four and a half per cent. The function of the public trustee was to stand between the Association and the public, and to see that a fair interest was paid. The members had agreed among themselves as to the costs of the sub-division survey, necessary before titles to them could be issued, but, after the incorporation of the Association, and the advent of the Public Trustee Office in the management, the costs would be definitely ascertained.

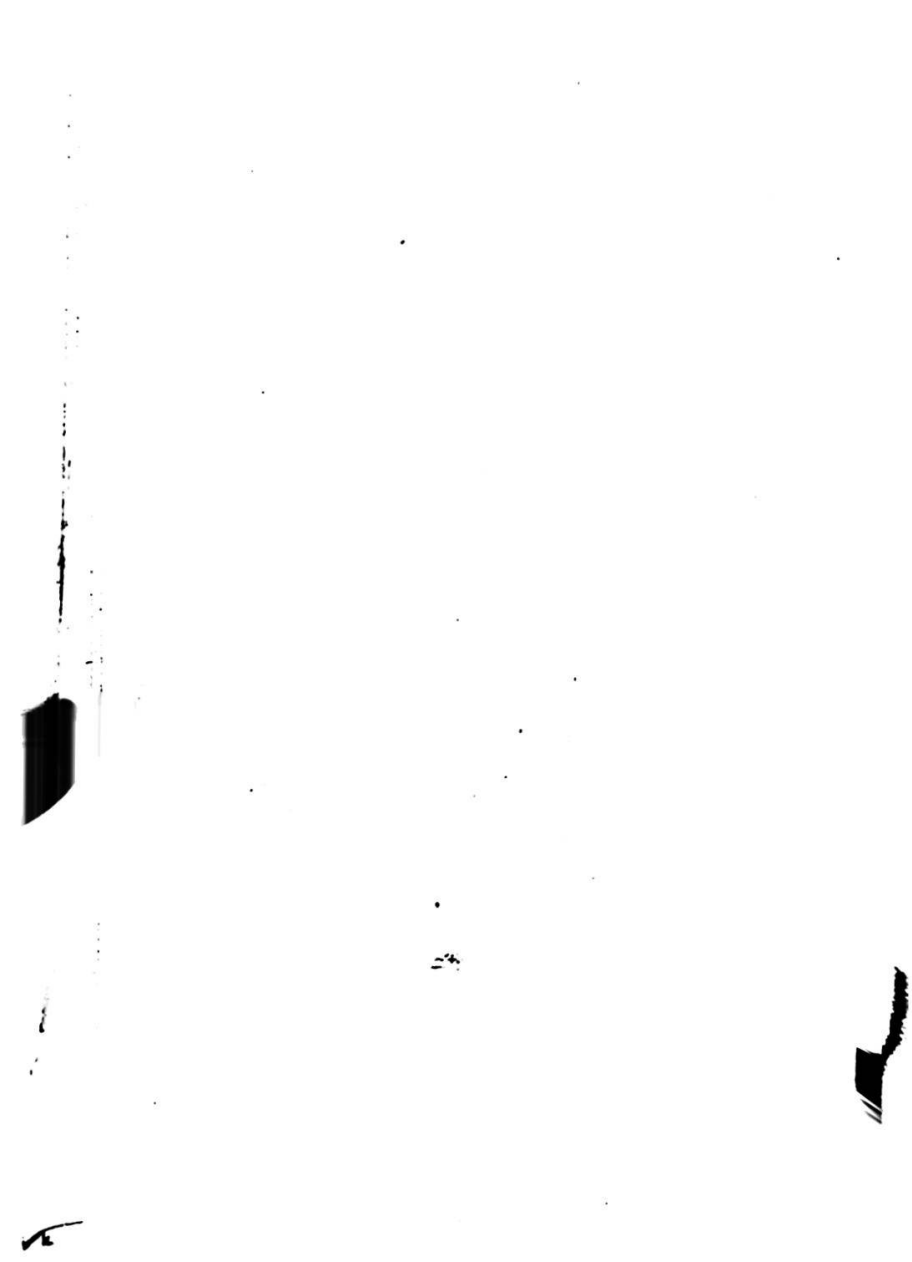
Owing to the limitation of expenses in making the Act, large numbers of people took up the land. As the years went by, and settlement increased, they began to complain about the roads. Each coach brought new settlers, and butter and wool were sent from the settlements to the market, as well as a lot of fat and store cattle and sheep. All this traffic began to tell on the roads to such an extent that settlers began to vent their feelings in the newspapers. Amongst others, the following appeared—

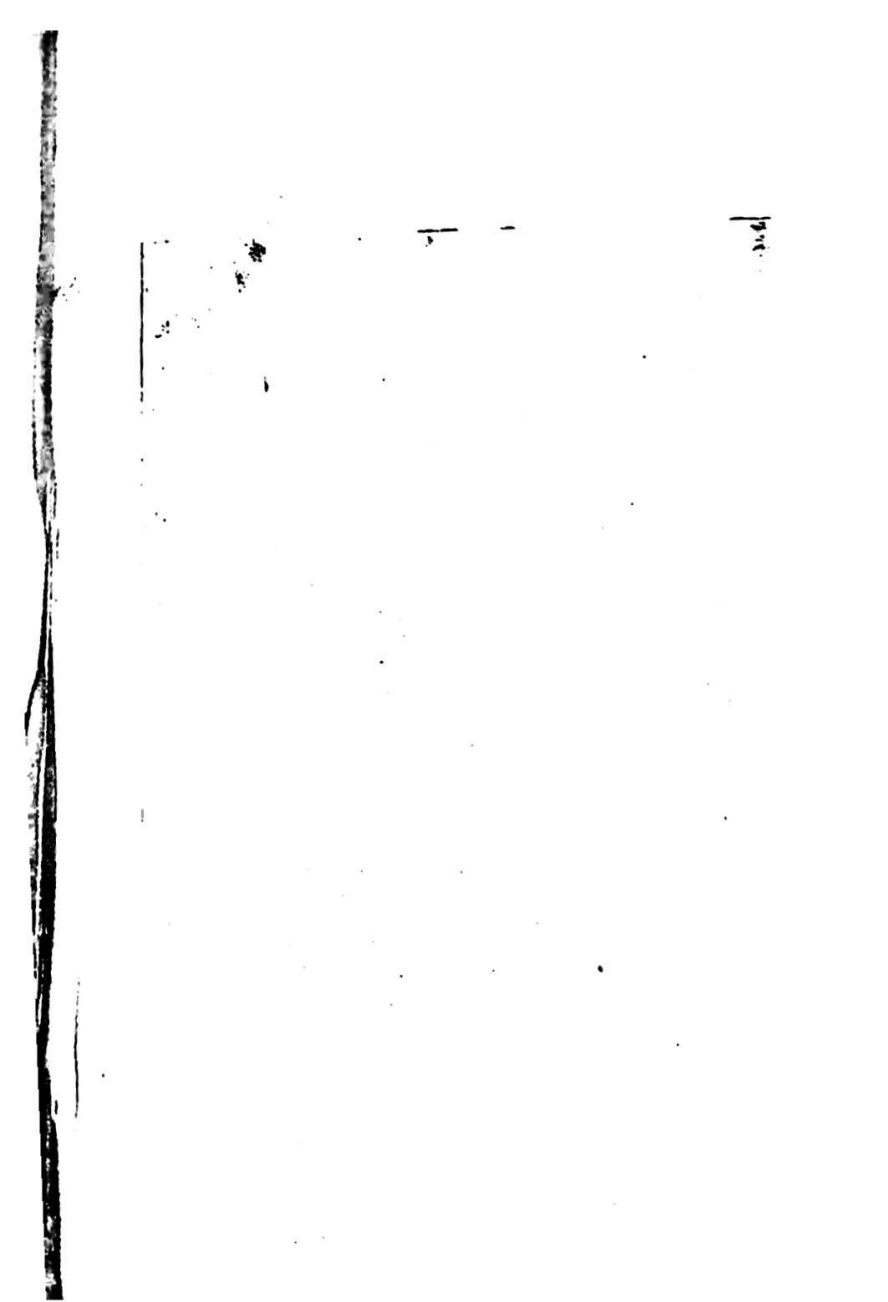
"The road from Huia to Poho is a disgrace to the Government, as no one seems to care. If some of the road engineers or road inspectors were dumped down on a milking farm, with sixteen miles to travel in the mud to get anywhere, they would possibly have some sympathy for the settlers.

"As it is, the Road Department has no sympathy for Crown tenants, or land settlement. If they had, they would use a little energy and put on a couple of men for a month to patch up the bad holes, and let



" They are gradually coming to a finishing point,"
replied Ralph.







The Railway Construction Camps were now a thing of the past.

settlers get in and about with some degree of comfort. On the last two trips of the coach Mr. Bob Scott broke the springs. There are two good men on the road, but it is impossible for them to keep a mud road in repair that has been so grossly neglected. The sooner the settlers get the road under the Survey Department again the better for everybody concerned.

"Very heavy rain has fallen all over the district, making the clay roads where there is much traffic impassable. The main road is in a very bad state. The Mona saddle is one long bog-hole half a mile long. Settlers are calling out in all directions for decent access to their holdings, and if the Government fails to put a considerable sum on the estimates to give these settlers decent roading facilities to get in and out the Government nominee will have a poor chance at the general election."

Another wrote—

"The question of roads is a burning question. A fortnight ago, two of us started with a couple of hundred sheep from our district, and it took seven days to drive them a little over fourteen miles, an average of little more than two miles a day; and the total journey, twenty-three miles, took nine days. In places, we had to literally carry them through the mud, and I personally was many times in mud nearly up to the hips helping sheep through.

"In other places we had to cut fascines and make small bridges, and twice we commandeered planking to make crossings over bad spots. Then, again, in other parts of the road, we had to go through private paddocks, and make deviations through tall fern, otherwise we could not have got through at all.

"Now, besides being the main road, it is also for at least fifteen miles the outlet for some hundreds of settlers, and no terms are too strong to express our opinion of its disgraceful state; and as to our own road or track, our condemnation is even stronger. It is well on to six years since this particular portion of the district was opened for settlement, and in common with many other districts, roads were marked

on the plan as either made or to be made straight away; and some settlers further in, who have been on their land for five years, have not even a six-foot track yet, and there is at least one lady who has been unable to get out to civilisation during that time. Is it any wonder that settlers get dissatisfied with a Government that treats them like this?

"The blame must be at the fountain-head. The engineers and staff do make some mistakes, but I believe they do their best with the funds at their disposal. Settlers go in, and proceed to cut a home out of the bush, expecting to rough it at first; but it is hard when—having put in some years, they ought to be getting a fair return for their outlay and hardships—they are prevented from doing so by bad roads, and in many cases want of roads at all. Coming to our own road (the bridle-track) through the open fern country, it is not so bad, but through the bush it was impossible to bring out sheep, and before leaving home we had to cut a new track through the standing bush in order to get the sheep in. I hope this may arouse some interest in what is rank injustice, as the hardships of settlers is dreadful."

The climax was reached when news was brought into the settlement that Mr. Jack Jackson, a young settler, had met a terrible death by being suffocated in the mud. It was some time before particulars were to hand, when it was found that he had left on the previous morning with a dray and three horses loaded with stores for one of the other settlements. Under ordinary circumstances the trip during winter is fraught with great danger, owing to the impassable state of the road.

The first intimation that an accident had happened was given by the leading horses of the dray galloping into the Home Settlement, and suspicion was immediately aroused and a search instigated. At a slip on the road about a quarter of a mile from the township, the party came upon the upturned dray with the shafter floundering in the mullock. But where was the driver?

After some difficulty the rescuers cut away the horse

and overturned cart. A sad sight then met their gaze. Embedded head downwards in mud up to his waist, and pinned down by a sack of potatoes, was seen the unfortunate young man, who left the township in the best of health and spirits. On the body being extracted, it was found that life was extinct. How the accident happened no one really knew.

Frequent notices appeared in the papers, and Ralph Messenger read them with intense interest. The "Land Associations" formed to pioneer the back-country of the North Island surely deserved something better than this! Bad roads! No metal! Bullocks and horses were constantly lost by being bogged in the road. Jack Jackson's death brought things to a climax. Drowned in the mud! It was awful! It was decided to request the Hon. Minister for Public Works to come and visit, and see for himself.

The question was raised in Parliament, and the Hon. Morton-King, the Minister for Roads and Bridges, was requested to pay an early visit and see if something could not be done. A large and influential deputation waited upon him, and entertained him at the Rodney Boarding House.

Mr. Westney proposed the health of the Hon. Morton-King, who, in reply, expressed himself in deep sympathy with the settlers, who, with their wives, were the backbone of the country. He regarded the life of the pioneer bush settler as more arduous and dangerous than that of the soldier on the field of battle, and he would always do all in his power to help them. He had a certain amount of money to spend as Minister for Roads, with which it would be his duty to meet urgent cases in the matter of roads and bridges. He could imagine nothing more delightful than to try and meet the wishes of settlers by giving them good roads and bridges, which would be well constructed. He could not make large promises, but assured them that he knew their difficulties, and hoped he would be able to help them, so that when he met them again he would be able to claim their confidence. He regretted the absence of the Premier, who, he was

sure, would have been delighted to be present, and thanked those present for the honour they had paid him.

Next day the Hon. Morton-King visited Atmore, and opened the Mangaehue bridge amidst great rejoicing.

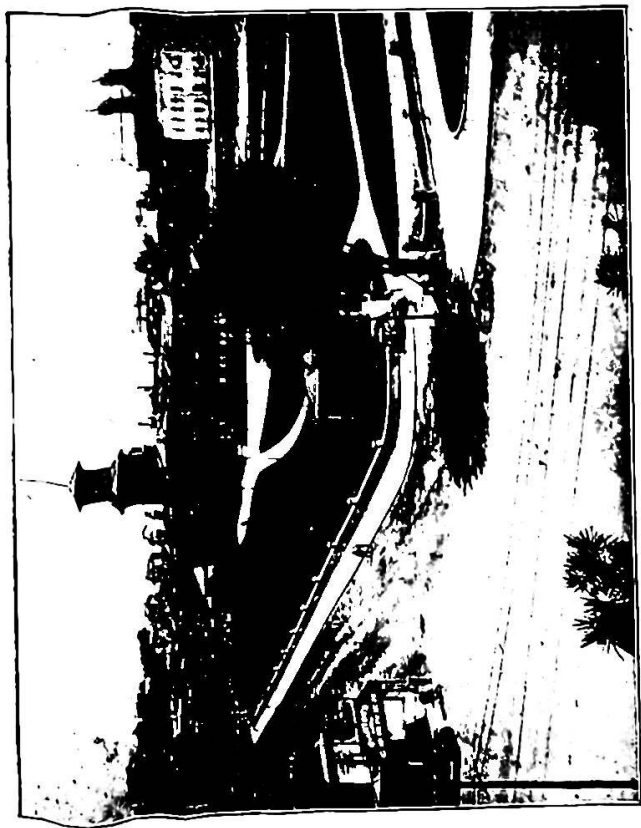
"Let's give him plenty of work while we have him," pleaded Ned Strawbridge, so it was arranged to open a new dairy factory close by.

Mr. Morton-King said this was the first dairy factory he had ever opened. But he could not wish to open one under better conditions, as all the settlers were interested, and all Crown settlers at that. He spoke at some length, and said he practically agreed with all that had been said, and stated that the new settled districts were the ones that needed help the most. He would like to see all votes expended.

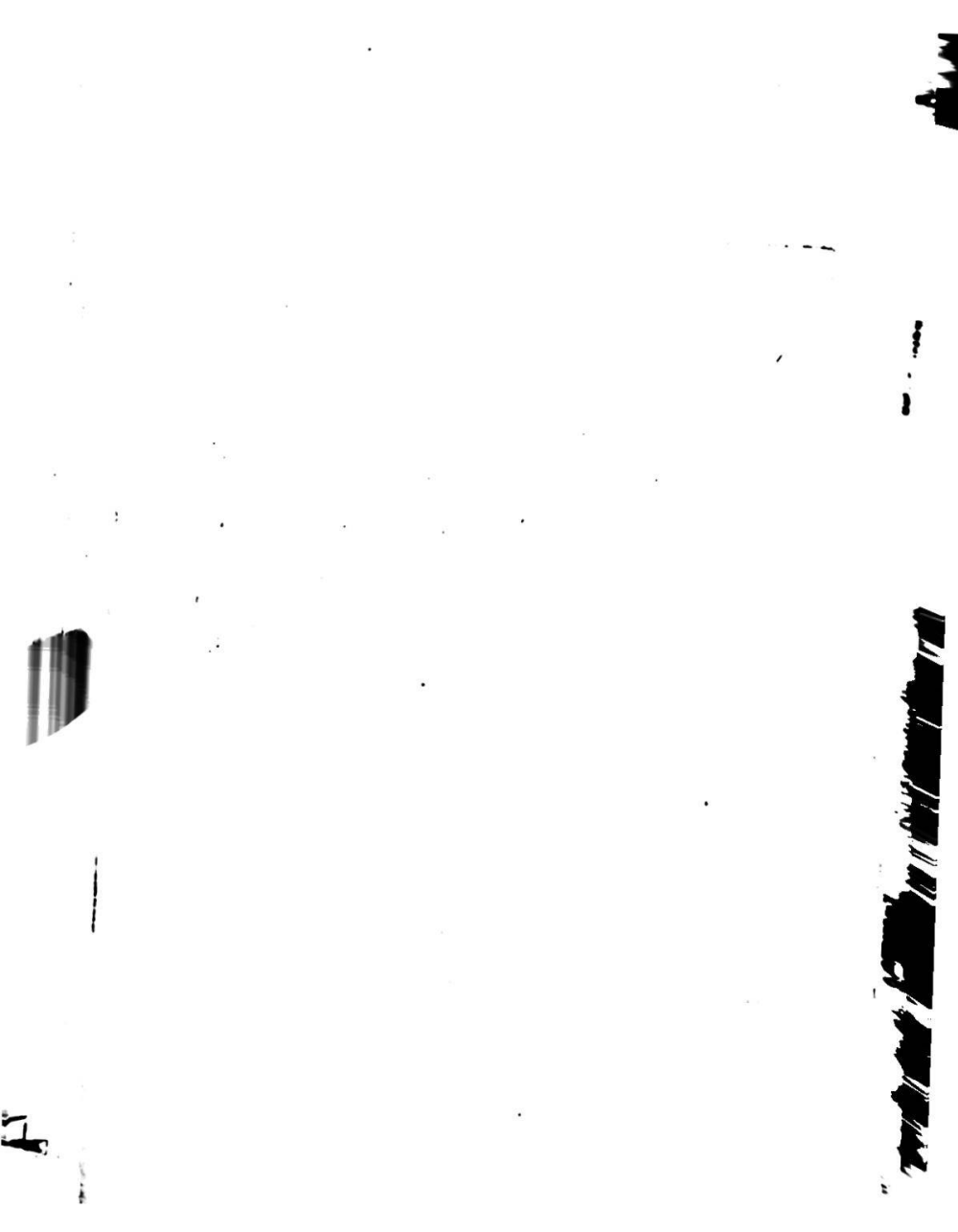
All votes were going to be authorised, and before he left Stopford he would be able to give them much information with regard to those allocated to their district. There had never been so much money available for work in the summer-time as at present. He had, in the last few days, issued a great many authorities, and he thought that some of the works they wanted had already been authorised. He wanted them to understand that monies voted for the district would be available at an early date, and his engineers had already been instructed that he wanted the works put in hand at once.

The Minister's next move was to another settlement, where a great crowd of settlers had assembled to meet him. Mr. McVicar said he had been requested by a large number of settlers to lay before him their most urgent needs. The principal one was the metalling of the main road.

Strange as the statement might appear, Mr. Morton-King said, he was glad his visit had been made in such bad weather, as he was able to see the conditions under which they worked. He would do all in his power to help them out of their difficulties. He would like to point out, however, that the road had already cost



Where the "Death-Knell of the Liquor Traffic was sounded.



approximately £90,000, and a very large portion of this sum had been spent in maintenance. The country was of a treacherous nature, and slips had caused an entirely unexpected expenditure. They could not leave the settlers in such a position that they could not get out of their holdings.

Here again the Minister's health was toasted, and in reply he thanked the gathering for the splendid reception given to himself and the Member for the district. He was sorry the Prime Minister could not be present, for he would have been delighted to meet so fine an assemblage of settlers in so remote a part of the Dominion. Surrounded as he was by men and women who were the back-bone of the country, he could not help thinking back to December 6th, 1890, when the Ballance Government was returned; he could not help thinking of the noble leaders of the Liberal Party. He then sketched the career and performances of the Liberal Government, and said that when he reflected on the Old Age Pensions Act he could not help feeling proud of his party.

Reference was also made to those statesmen who were chiefly responsible for the cheap money scheme. Capitalists had refused to advance money, preferring to starve settlers off the land. The Government had raised a loan of three million pounds, and had broken the back of the money-lenders.

Referring to the Women's Franchise and other measures, he said New Zealand was the envy of the Australian States. Ambassadors from Europe and America had come to study our laws, which were the admiration of the whole world. New Zealand had been the screw-propellor and rudder of the Universe for years past. As a member of the Cabinet he would endeavour to help forward the country, and to study the wants of those who were making it. He hoped to do a lot of good in the way of roads. They need not be afraid of debt if the money was properly spent. He would endeavour to spend the money fairly. He had seen a good deal of the country, and now knew more of its requirements than ever he did. He

would do his very best to obtain all the money possible, and to spend it to the best advantage of the settlers. The Member for the district thanked the gathering for its kind reception. He recalled the condition of the settlement twelve years ago, and said settlers deserved recognition for their pluck and hard work. Mr. Morton-King was the right man in the right place.

Mr. McFadden, in a short but able speech, referred to the magnitude of the work of the local bodies, and to the great assistance given by the Government in the way of cheap loans. Mr. Morton-King, he said, was in sympathy with the settlers, but they needed more than sympathy.

Mr. Pherson said the Taranaki Province was the most prosperous district in New Zealand. The enterprise of the settlers was proved by the co-operative dairy factories, butterbox factories, and freezing works, and he hoped before long they would have co-operative meat-freezing works. The future of Taranaki depended on a deep sea-harbour, and a railway from Stopford to Overton. The whole district should unite in not only urging the start, but the completion of this railway. There was a bright future if they would pull together. The Minister of Roads was in full sympathy with the back-blocks settlers. The outcome of this visit resulted in an agitation for a railway.

CHAPTER V

THE PROCLAMATION

" Oh, there's good in labour,
If we labour but aright,
That gives vigour to the day-time,
And sweeter sleep at night.

F. D. GAGE.

A PARLIAMENTARY Election was about to take place. One of the great questions to be settled in the Stopford Electorate was the giving of better facilities for opening up the back country.

Mud! mud! mud! Seas of it made travelling very difficult, and to get stores and provisions to the various settlements at the back of Stopford was becoming more and more a difficult problem, as the cost was not only prohibitive, but the danger to life and limb was most serious.

" There is only one way to accomplish it," said Mr. Christopher Dobelling, " and if you return me to represent you in Parliament, I will impress upon the Government the immediate necessity of constructing a railway. A railway, gentlemen, which will not only open up your country, but one which will, in the years to come, be one of the great thoroughfares of the North Island. If the Government will not introduce such a measure, I will do it for you, and compel them to take the matter up."

There was tremendous excitement in the Electorate, and on Polling Day, Christopher Dobelling headed the poll by a substantial majority. There was great rejoicing on the part of the town and country settlers.

It was not long before Parliament was opened in Wellington, with becoming ceremony.

The speech from the Throne was given by Lord Turkington, who stated that the Government were most anxious to help the development of the country,

and would, as far as possible, endeavour to relieve the hardships of the pioneer settlers by the construction of railways, roads, and bridges.

Christopher Dobelling, M.P. for Stopford had the honour of speaking to the Address in reply, and stated it was his intention to move that a railway be authorised from Stopford right into the hinterland of Taranaki, ultimately linking up the West Coast of the North Island with the Main Trunk. Weighty arguments were adduced, and lengthy petitions were laid on the table of the House from the settlers affected.

The Right Hon. the Premier, Johnson Backhouse, said the speech from the Member for Stopford had touched him much, and he would have a survey made of the proposed route, and an estimate prepared by the chief engineer as to the probable cost, to be reported on before the end of the session. This news filled the hearts of the Government supporters and electors of Stopford with noticeable joy; and when the *Evening Chronicle* reported that the surveyors were actually at work, taking a flying survey, and that the engineers were also going over the proposed route and getting material ready for their report, the electors were in high glee. The work took some time, as there was some rough country to traverse, and several high cuttings and tunnels to undertake. At last they completed their work, and word was received that the report was to be presented to Parliament.

It was highly favourable, and Members received it sympathetically. The Prime Minister stated it would be considered fully and thoroughly by the Cabinet.

The promise was fulfilled, and a Bill was introduced into the House authorising the construction of a new railway from Stopford to Overton, to be completed in five years. Bonnets were thrown on the green! The Railway League was more than delighted, and predicted great things for the future. A land boom set in. Property owners divided and sub-divided their town sections. Houses went up in all directions. People flocked from all parts of the country. Work was plentiful. Stopford was having the time of its life.

"Wonderful!" said old Jasper Robinson. "Didn't think 'twould ever move like this. Why, the place is going to be as big as Chicago in America. If only I had known, I might have made my fortune! Could have bought all the sections fronting the centre of the town for a pound an acre when I came here."

The sound of blasting was frequently heard, as the bush and stumps were uprooted and daily exterminated to allow the streets to be formed.

Stopford rapidly began to assume that it was going to become a city. Having shaken off the protection of the County Council it became a Town Board. But it soon graduated into a borough, and Samuel Tomlinson was elected its first mayor. Stopford was to be the coming town of the north, said the report.

"Have to be careful," said Jasper, "or else we'll all suffer from swelled head."

"Not a bit," said Olander Sturmer. "Nothing like a bit of a blow."

"Get plenty of that from Mount Egmont," replied Jasper. "Didn't do such things when I was a boy. Don't know what things are coming to. Mark my words! There will be a slump after this—plenty of empty houses. People are overdoing it. Just fancy! They're going to make a park re'et in the town. Why, this country will soon suffer as bad as England! Came out here to get away from it. The curse of England is its parks, full of hares, rabbits, partridges, pheasants, and deer. Many a man has been sent to Botany Bay for shooting a rabbit. That's what will happen here yet."

"Oh, but this is a park for recreation. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, you know. He must have a breathing space."

"Plenty of room on top of Mount Egmont," concluded the old man. "What with football, cricket, shooting, and other kinds of sport—soon want no work at all in the colonies."

The change was coming too quickly for this old veteran. He had not been accustomed to see a city spring up, as it were, in a day. He remembered when there was only a bush-track where the Devon-Welling-

ton railway now ran, and when the wild bulls and cattle roamed at leisure through the bush which once covered the site of the town.

He would never forget going out with Hugh Vedder, the daring Shetlander, and how they had to clear for their lives, through the under-scrub, and run, for a mob of wild cattle had given chase. They were separated for a while, and when he came back he found Hugh hanging on to a ferocious bull by the horns, a horn in each hand.

Hugh was tremendously strong in those days. In fact, he did not know his own strength.

"Come along quickly, Jasper," roared Hugh Vedder, "and cut his throat while I hold him."

This was soon done, and both men stood and looked at the wild giant of the forest lying at their feet. Hugh Vedder knew no fear, and was as bold as a lion. They went on several occasions in company on these hunting expeditions, and Jasper always delighted to tell with some considerable amusement how, on one occasion, a wild boar of Captain Cook's stock gave charge, and, just as they were gaining a tree, the boar caught Hugh by the seat of his pants, and, by means of his hugh tusk—made an awful rent.

Poor Hugh! He got a tremendous fright, but happily escaped with nothing worse than the loss of his trousers. A sack, which they had brought to carry home the game, supplied material for a new pair of pants. A piece of flax acted as thread, and so they managed to reach home after their adventure. They succeeded in despatching the old boar, and when Jasper pays Hugh a visit they often look at the tremendous tusks mounted on the front room wall. They have a hearty laugh when Jasper exclaims, "Bedad, Hugh, it was a close shave you got in that adventure."

What a change! They were to have streets and shops. What was once heavy bush and the home and haunt of wild cattle and the descendants of Captain Cook's pigs, from which they stocked their larder, was now the home of the saw-miller, the settler, and shop-keeper. Now they were going to have a railway to open up the country further back.

What stories these old pioneers can tell! You have only to wind them up like a gramophone, and off they go! How they used to walk and tramp through the trackless bush—ford rivers, carry their provisions and sometimes their children and wives on their backs. However, the old day has gone. A new is unfolding. Why, the streets were to be metalled! Bullock drays were being superseded by traps. The motor-car and flying-machine were not yet on the market.

The principal companions of the old pioneer were his gun, his axe, and his pipe. His appetite was good, and his constitution of iron. What did he fear? Very often the punga was his pillow, and the canopy of heaven his covering. All these experiences were over when Jacob Chambers and Harry Champness arrived in the Dominion. They had been working some time in Wellington, but they did not intend to stay in the town. No. As their job was nearly finished they began to look around. At last they decided to go to the land flowing with milk and honey, as Taranaki was beginning to be called.

All eyes were centred on Stopford. Plenty of work and good pay. So they decided to move thither. The long train journey proved of immense interest as they travelled along. They were charmed with the new country. They were not long in Stopford before they both got work, and found more than enough to do.

They had credentials from England to the Methodist minister of the town, to be presented where they might settle. One night after work they decided to make a call, and present their papers. They found him at home. He gave them a hearty welcome, and asked them inside. He said he, too, was from the Old Land, and had been over thirty years preaching amongst the settlers of New Zealand. They were not to be discouraged. "I am not bound to win," said Abraham Lincoln, "but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to what light I have. We must put the emphasis in the right places if life is to be truly lived."

The Rev. Joseph Challenger was a hearty, hale,

well-preserved, homely man. He was not afraid of hard work—in fact, he had spent the greater part of his Colonial ministry roughing it. He had a good idea of what was before Jacob and Harry, and gave them an inspiration from Lincoln for a start. He and his good wife had rendered faithful service to the Church in different parts of the Dominion, and the Conference had recognised that faithfulness by placing him in the Presidential Chair a few years previously. They had passed through the shadows themselves, and knew how to sympathise with others.

"We are in need of local preachers," said Mr. Challenger, "and can give you work almost at once. Some men lose their preaching overboard on the way out. Glad you have landed it with you. I want a service supplied next Sunday up one of the roads about five miles out, and should be glad if Mr. Chambers would go to the Crow School."

"I will do my best," replied Jacob. "I allus feel that an opportunity is God's door, and He means me to go, if I am free."

"I'll send my boy Phil round on Sunday after dinner, and you can ride the circuit horse. We have our Quarterly Local Preachers' Meeting shortly, and we shall be glad to welcome you on to our plan."

Having had a very pleasant evening, they returned home.

"All-Right man that! Got the root of the matter in him. None of your 'He that hath yaws to yaw, let him yaw' about him! Why? He was just like one of ourselves! And his wife?—Why, she's first-rate!"

"We've fallen on our feet all right."

"Bless the Lord!" exclaimed Jacob. "How he prayed for our success, and that the 'Lord would be at the helm of all our affairs.'"

Sunday morning came. Dear old Egmont was clothed with majesty, and gave splendour to the morning walk. They had no difficulty in finding the church, with their wives and families.

The doorkeeper was ordained to the position, and was the right man in the right place. A hearty hand-

shake. A glad-to-see-you sort of welcome, and a book, with a comfortable seat, gave the right key-note. This all prepared the way for the service, and Joseph Challenger had a good time, and as the choir and congregation sang—

"Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away.
In Jesu's keeping we are safe, and they."

they were taken back to the village life, and the church in dear old England. How they enjoyed the service! Jacob's fervent "Amens" made the congregation look up from time to time; but he said he could not deny his Lord by putting his handkerchief in his mouth to stop it from coming out.

"It must come out, or I'll burst," he said.

They felt quite at home, and resolved to throw in their lot with the "Prims," for Methodist Union had not yet taken place.

After dinner was over, Phil Challenger hove in sight with the circuit horse for Jacob to ride to the Crow School.

"It will take you about an hour. Stirrups right length? Yes."

"Horse quiet?" asked Jacob.

"Oh yes. Good time to you. Never mind a bit of mud, and you will be all right."

Jacob set off, and after travelling about two miles along the main road he struck off on his way to Crow.

He had not gone far, when swish! swish! swish! the horse plunged through the mud. Would he ever get there?

"Steady! Up, Charlie! We don't want to go back to England this route," exclaimed Jacob, as faithful Charlie nearly disappeared in the floundering mud.

Jacob managed to get him out, but was plastered extensively from head to foot with the soft mud. He presented rather an unique figure on his arrival at the building where the service was to be held. He was not in a very comfortable position, as his boots were nearly full of slimy muddy water.

CHAPTER VI

TURNING THE FIRST SOD

"Jesus! the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky,
Angels and men before it fall,
And devils fear and fly."

HOWEVER, nothing daunted he opened out, and declared that he had bested the "old devil," who had tried to discourage and keep him from taking his first service in this new land. He commenced with the well-known words at the head of this chapter, to the tune of "Diadem," which every warm-hearted Methodist adores.

It was not long before he had the devils cut up and flying in all directions, much to the enjoyment of the congregation. Jacob's intense earnestness caused them to overlook his drollery and manner, for they realised that they were face to face with a man of God.

Jacob got what he called the victory while he sang "as the devils were twisted and scattered," while the tune was sung. He further declared they would never trouble him any more in connection with his preaching in New Zealand. He was not likely to forget his first service at Crow School, nor the congregation either.

When Jacob reached his home, his wife threw up her hands and exclaimed, "What a sight! You never conducted service in that state, surely?"

Jacob declared he had, and told how the devil had been put to flight, so that even the "oceans of mud" were not going to keep him from witnessing for his Master.

The following Sunday night, the preacher appointed to sustain the service did not arrive, and Harry Champness found himself in the pulpit.

"I baint much of a fellow to look at. I'm not

accustomed to stuck-up ways and starch, but if you'll tak ma as I am, I'll do the best I can; and when I have done I'll just shut up. Everybody knew me at home (that is what you call England out here) as Bill Champness' lad. Why? Because there was something about me which resembled my father. So friends, there should be something about you, and all of us, which resembles Jesus Christ. Our actions, our conversation, our lives, should show that we are related to Him. Love is the key-note. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye love one another. It is not any 'ism,' sect, or creed, but 'Are you disciples of Jesus Christ?' Love to one another is the test of discipleship."

A tiptop Methodist prayer-meeting followed. Power came down, and men and women began to pray for more of the spirit of Christ. It was not long before every member was round the communion-rail for consecration.

"Glory!" shouted Jacob Chalmers. "It's Pentecost over again!"

The outcome of the service was that the minister and officials asked for the meetings to be continued, and the announcement was made that—

HARRY CHAMPNESS, The Lancashire Lad,
and

JACOB CHAMBERS, from Lincolnshire,
would conduct a fortnight's REVIVAL MISSION.

What a time they had! The earnestness and quaintness of the men attracted the crowd, and the Spirit of God backed home the Word, and many were soundly converted.

"Let's sing the Doxology, and close," cried the leader.

"Not yet!"

A movement was made in the back seat, and out rushed a young fellow named Tom Jackson, the leader of infidelity amongst the young men. The angels in heaven rejoiced over his conversion that night.

The following night Tom came up to the front, and

brought his companion, and then turned and addressed the crowd.

"Cards and betting have been my ruin, boys. Here goes!" and he tore a handful of betting cards to pieces. "Come and try my new Friend!"

A rousing chorus invitation was then sung, and Jacob welcomed convert after convert, as he paced up and down the aisle of the church, crying in his broad dialect—

"Cum, cum! Cum away to the front! Cum! Cum now! He is waiting. Cum!" He thought he was at home in a Lincolnshire village.

Before the mission closed, several remarkable cases of conversion took place, and beer-drinkers and pot-house loafers were added to the list of those who were "saved." Jacob said it was impossible to tell what God could not do with one consecrated man or woman.

"Live up to your privileges, and make Stopford the place noted for intense spirituality."

The coming of these warm-hearted spiritually minded men was as a bit of sunshine let down from heaven.

The Stopford to Overton Railway Authorisation Bill having passed through both Houses of Parliament, the Public Works statement was eagerly looked for, and the Minister in charge showed his sincerity by the item "Stopford-Overton Railway, £50,000."

The permanent surveyors soon got to work and speedily the project was sufficiently advanced to allow the first sod to be turned. The Right Hon. the Premier, Johnson Backhouse, was invited to perform this interesting ceremony.

The auspicious day arrived. A public holiday had been proclaimed in honour of the occasion. The whole countryside was present. County councillors, with their chairman, the mayor, and his colleagues. Special excursions were run from the various centres. Flags were flying, bands playing, and on this occasion even the cows were no longer worshipped, for all were bent on witnessing the commencement of this national undertaking.

For hours before the time appointed, crowds of settlers and visitors began to arrive from all parts of the Province. The school children had a holiday for the occasion, and as they led the assemblage, Tom Bracken's New Zealand National Hymn rolled from several thousand throats—

" God of nations, at Thy feet
In the bonds of love we meet ;
Hear our voices, we entreat ;
God defend our free land ;
Guard Pacific's triple star
From the shafts of strife and war ;
Make her praises heard afar ;
God defend New Zealand.

Men of every creed and race
Gather here before Thy face,
Asking Thee to bless this place ;
God defend our free land ;
From dissension, envy, hate,
Make our country good and great ;
God defend New Zealand.

Let our love for Thee increase,
May Thy blessings never cease,
Give us plenty, give us peace ;
God defend our free land ;
From dishonour and from shame
Guard our country's spotless name,
Crown her with immortal fame ;
God defend New Zealand.

May our mountains ever be
Freedom's ramparts by the sea ;
Make us faithful unto Thee ;
God defend our free land ;
Guard her in the nation's van,
Preaching love and truth to man,
Working out Thy glorious plan ;
God defend New Zealand."

The spot chosen for the great event was alongside the Wellington-Devon line.

The Hon. Johnson Backhouse was selected to perform the ceremony, and congratulated the settlers on at last being able to open such an important railway as the Stopford-Overton, a distance of some hundred miles or so, to be constructed between the southern and northern ends.

Railway construction in New Zealand, he continued, was not an easy undertaking, and then there were so many requests from all parts; added to this, there was the question of money. Only so much could be allocated each year; again, there were engineering difficulties, but all these could be overcome.

The Premier congratulated them on having such a fine day, with such evidence of the district's prosperity. He then took off his coat, and, assuming the temporary occupation of a navvy, shovelled a barrowful of soil and tipped it at the spot where the new line would connect, and declared the first sod well and truly turned. He then called upon Mr. Christopher Dobelling, their Member, to say a few words.

The Member was heartily received, and stated that he had been all over the ground to be traversed by the new railway, and had taken five day's heavy travelling to accomplish it. The greatest engineering difficulty was in the various tunnels that must be put through the rough country, one of which, nearly a mile in length, would be rather an extraordinary one, as far as engineering was concerned. Two shafts, each over thirty feet deep, had to be sunk before a level can be got to take them into Mona. Another engineering difficulty will be to get through the Rakau Gorge, and it is understood that a tunnel a mile and a quarter long will require to be driven. From thence on to Overton through Ora and Tiera the work of construction would not amount to anything out of the ordinary. As the construction of the line from the Overton end would be such an easy matter, he (Mr. Dobelling) said he would fail to understand the attitude of the Minister for Public Works if he did not immediately

proceed with the work, for the population of this district now totalled over two thousand, and was prosperous and well settled. Further, about ten miles from Overton it was intended to shortly open up a block of ten thousand acres, and there was every reason to justify the immediate construction of the railway at this end.

"I am delighted with the assurance of the Prime Minister that the Stopford-Overton line is to be finished in five years, and that, when a certain point is reached, a start will be made with the Overton end," concluded Mr. Dobelling, "and every endeavour will be used on my part to encourage the Government to pursue a progressive policy to this end."

As soon as the ceremony was over a rush was made to the newly turned sod, and handfuls were taken away by the interested crowd as a memento of such historic proceedings.

The Prime Minister was afterwards banqueted and toasted as the patron saint of Stopford. He paid a glowing tribute to Christopher Dobelling, the Member for the district. He admired him for his pluck and determination, and showed what could be accomplished by grit and hard work, quoting as examples the work of two English M.P.'s—Thomas Burt and Joseph Arch.

Thomas Burt was fifteen or sixteen years of age before he began to read, and then study became a passion with him. He walked ten miles to buy his first book, developed a taste for the best literature, and the classic authors were his constant mental companions in the pit. At the age of seventeen Mr. Burt made his first attempt at public speaking, and the result was a complete breakdown. The audience sang to reassure him, but he could not proceed. "Call your next man," he said, "I will never attempt to speak again until I get whiskers."

"Keep on," cried the Premier. "Think of Joseph Arch, who achieved the marvellous feat of fully organising the agricultural labourers of England. He began his career by frightening birds off the crops at

fourpence per day. At that time tea was seven shillings a pound, and sugar too dear to sweeten it with. The average wage amongst the labourers was twelve shillings a week ; they asked for sixteen, Arch got it for them. In a few months the members of the National Agricultural Labourers Union numbered fifty thousand, and ultimately he was returned to the English Parliament as one of the pioneer members. You pioneer settlers have your difficulties, but, remember, there are others who likewise have had them, and conquered ; while there are many others who would give a great deal to be in this land of plenty, able to carve out homes for themselves, with a prospect of ultimately becoming independent."

The Battle of Life was a strenuous one. To the young men, and boys and girls of the settlers who have not the privileges of acquiring as good educational advantages, and are perhaps hankering after things beyond their reach, he would quote the words of Sir G. H. Reid, delivered in a lecture some time ago—

"How many of these brilliant young fellows who win University distinction are ever heard of afterwards?" Proceeding to answer his own question, he said "that many of them, by intense study, broke down the physical bases of their brain before they were properly matured. That was why men like Sir Henry Parkes (who left school at eight years of age) came out like giants in the battle of life. In my own case, I left school when I was thirteen, and did not think I knew much, but I learned more in the first twelve months I was in an office than ever before. If I had had the luck to have a rich father, and gone to the University, I might have worked hard, won a scholarship, and rested on my laurels ever since."

Of the two evils in childhood, underwork of the brain, he held, was infinitely safer than overwork. But he was not afraid that the young Colonials would overwork themselves.

In conclusion, the Premier declared the people before him were the true empire builders.

"The term 'Empire' is convenient, but it is apt to

be misleading. It suggests a collection of nations held together by force. With the exception of India, no considerable part is held by the power of the sword. Our Empire is held together by the slightest of bonds, which are, nevertheless, stronger than links of iron. A common ancestry, a mother-country, a common kindred, language and traditions, weld us together, whether we live in the United Kingdom, in Canada, in Australia, in South Africa, or New Zealand. For defence we all look to the mother-country, and our King is theirs also.

The idea of 'Empire' stirs the imagination, and everyone hopes that we shall remain one strong, united whole. Whether this will be attained by a system of trade preferences between the oversea dominions and colonies and the mother-country, or by the establishment of an "Empire Parliament," no man is in a position to say; but all may hope that, as the years roll by, Britons all over the world will draw nearer and nearer—

' Into one Imperial whole,
One with Britain, heart and soul—
One like, one flag, one fleet, one throne ! '

Rome in her palmy days and in the height of her glory had no such widespread possessions as the British race holds to-day. The British colonies, and dominions, protectorates, and spheres of influence cover no less than one-sixth of all the land on the globe, and comprise one-fourth of all the people on the earth. The constituent parts of our Empire are found in every ocean, in every continent, in every clime, from the icy polar wastes to the sweltering heat of the tropics, and nowhere can there be found a more loyal people than those in 'God's Own Country,' declared the Premier.

"Well has the vast British dominion been called a World Empire, and you, by your action to-day in starting to build another railway, are forging another link in that grand and glorious Empire upon which the sun never sets; so we loyally sing—

" Three cheers for the red, white, and blue."

The Prime Minister resumed his seat, and was given a great ovation. It had been truly a gala day for Stopford.

The settlers, having given their Premier a sumptuous send-off as he left for the seat of Government by special train, returned to their various settlements considerably heartened by the magnificent speech delivered by the Right Hon. Johnson Backhouse, and felt several inches taller as they realised that they "out-back" were helping to build the future and destiny of the nation. The word "Empire" had now a new charm for them.

CHAPTER VII

A NEW CHUM

" Hurrah for the honest workers !
Hurrah for the young and old !
The men of worth all over the earth ;—
Hurrah for the workers bold ! "

RALPH MESSENGER found true help in the well-equipped Young Men's Christian Association in Wellington. Its warmth of welcome, and its secretary, who seemed to so thoroughly understand him, proved to him a pillar of strength. They had just organised a big money-raising scheme, and with the proceeds had erected their new building, which was splendidly equipped with all that appealed to a young man—reading-rooms, gymnasium, debating societies, Bible classes, glee club, book-keeping classes, etc., almost too numerous to mention, in full swing each night. Then there were the very fine bathrooms and the sleeping accommodation, and the catering arrangements all reflected great credit on the matron and management. But the Men's Own Meeting, and Strangers' Tea on the Sunday afternoons, he liked the best. He felt a better man after them. The second Sunday afternoon the President was announced to give the address, and, in the course of an interesting speech, remarked that it was sixty-nine years ago since, in a small upper room in St. Paul's Churchyard, London, the Y.M.C.A. movement had first commenced.

From that small beginning had grown a great, world-wide movement, with over eight thousand branches, and more than a million enrolled members. In these Southern lands the movement had early taken root, and of late years had grown with wonderful rapidity. Within the past few years over £80,000 had been spent

in New Zealand on Association buildings. Someone has said that "a city's best asset is its young men." It had also been stated that there were at least from twelve to thirteen thousand young men in our city, a large proportion of whom were in lodgings. In days gone by it had been said that the Association worked in grooves altogether too narrow, and did not take into account the three-fold and complex nature of man, and consequently turned out a lop-sided type of character, not by any means admirable. Such was not the case to-day. While the religious and spiritual side are not lost sight of, and must never be lost sight of in an Association that is essentially Christian, yet in all modern Y.M.C.A.'s special provision is made for intellectual and physical culture, while the social element in our nature is fully recognised. Hence the thoroughly equipped gymnasiums, popular table games, lecture, concert and social halls, and so forth. Indeed, everything possible is provided to attract young men, and that on the broadest lines imaginable. In such a building as this, youths and young men found a pleasant and safe resort, and the stranger found a welcome, a home, and a friend.

Everything which is necessary for the physical development of the body, and for the training and uplifting of the mind, will be found within the Y.M.C.A. To keep everyone well in body and mind, it is essential that the hours of play and work be equally agreeable; many of the young fellows who will join this movement will have the opportunity of associating with others of their own age and race, and it will foster ideals and set an example which will materially influence future generations.

Christian citizenship is not attained by any one attribute. True citizenship is gained by doing all that is possible for the whole community, and not grudging small personal service if it be the means of assisting someone less fortunate over the stile.

The President said he would like to see the young men of the community taking a much keener interest in the city and in local government than they had

in the past. Perhaps the young fellows present could do something to quicken the civic conscience. It was a regrettable fact that young men, as a general rule, gave little attention to the politics and administration of their city. They could not expect the old residents, who had laid the foundations of the city, to be always with them, and their mantles must fall upon the young men of the Y.M.C.A. He, too, said with their National Secretary it was up to them to do it.

Ralph thoroughly enjoyed the address, and made up his mind that he would be one, at least, who would "play the man," and try and get others to do the same. The time he spent in Wellington gave him a chance of looking around. But the city life was not for him. Too many crowded into the towns. A few days after his arrival he paid a visit to the Government Labour Bureau. Men were wanted for the Stopford-Overton railway, according to the *Evening Post*. No capital was needed. Tent, pick, and shovel were provided, and railway fare paid, and deducted out of first wages.

Ralph made one of the number that took the early morning train for the new works. It was a long journey, and it was with considerable interest that he boarded the train which was to take him to the scene of action. The works were situated nearly a day's journey from the Empire City, as the Wellington people delighted to call it. The shades of evening were falling as he reached Stopford, where he had to stay for the night. He was not long in reaching the engineer's office, to report his arrival.

"What is your name?" asked Mr. Glasson, the engineer.

"Ralph Messenger."

"Been long out?"

"Just arrived in this country," replied Ralph.

"Oh! You're a new chum."

"Beg pardon? A what?"

"Oh! I see you do not understand," said the engineer. "A new chum is one who is new to the country. This usually applies until a person has been

out ten years. What can you do ? " asked Mr. Glasson kindly.

" Oh ! Anything at all. I'm not particular. I am not afraid of work."

" Well, I think you had better go with the ' ballast gang ' for the present, at Fiddler's Road. I will give you a note to Mr. Trucman, the man in charge. The pits are a few miles out. Go to the storeman with this ticket, and he will give you a tent, shovel, and a pick. You will need to get provisions from the store to take with you. You will need blankets and bedding. You will find timber there to make a frame for your tent, also from which to make a bunk."

" What is a bunk, sir ? "

" Oh, a rough bedstead. You will need a billy, frying-pan, saucepan, plates, knife and fork, and an enamel mug. Here is the order. Take it to the store, and on presentation the manager will hand you the goods. The cost of these will be stopped out of your first wages."

Ralph was not long in reaching the store, and secured his outfit and provisions.

" If you look alive, you will catch the ballast train. She has just brought a load of gravel into the station yard, and is returning shortly to the pits."

In railway construction work there are a great many different phases. First, there is the flying survey by the surveying engineers, who peg out the route and take the levels, and by means of sticks and pegs show the route and the height of the formation work needed. The surface road has then to be made, to allow the material to be carted ahead of the workers. This is often a difficult piece of work, and the heavy traffic necessitates constant attention. The navvy is now an important man, whose principal work is to shift the earth by means of trucks, or barrows, and place it in a position for foundation and formation purposes, upon which to lay a temporary line of rails and sleepers. The plate-layers then come along and lay these across the newly formed track, and upon these the iron rails are laid. Upon these the ballast

engine and train can travel and unload its heavier and harder substance, in the shape of metal or gravel, until sufficient material has been deposited to bring the track up to the engine level. Usually the sleepers and rails have to be raised three times before the track is permanently and sufficiently settled for passenger traffic.

Then there are the bridge-builders, whose work is either to put in culverts of concrete over narrow streams (creeks) or, if very long, drive in piles of wood by means of a "monkey," a huge lump of iron weighing half a ton, which is raised up and down by means of wire ropes elevated over a specially prepared high frame. This long pile has an iron spike, or protector, called a shoe, which protects the end entering the ground and also enables it to penetrate or be driven through stony ground. These piles are usually made of Australian iron bark, on account of its hard nature and long durability. Bridge-builders are most important men, and thus make or mar the progress of a railway in its construction. Then there are the tunnel workers, who pierce the mountains or hills—usually men who take delight in mining or underground work. Like bridge-builders, they are most essential in hilly country. Sometimes huge swamps have to be drained, and rivers diverted from their course. This at times is a tremendous undertaking, as thousands of tons of stuff are needed to fill in to make the railway track safe and secure. Into such country, surroundings, and work Ralph Messenger arrived.

It was not long before calico tents were to be seen in every direction. From Stopford to Poro was the first section, while even further an advance guard was at work preparing the way. Railways are usually constructed in sections or lengths, the work being of a miscellaneous or varied character, as already indicated. A big swoop or curve brought the line out of Stopford, connecting the Wellington-Devon line, thence it continued on a fairly level grade through flat country for some distance. All this work was undertaken by surfacemen and navvies.

A halt was now met with, for bridge-builders were at work throwing a bridge across the Atea river. Having thrown this structure across, the line moved forward, for neither mountains nor rivers can keep back the iron horse. On through cuttings and over gullies the formation was made. Swamp drainers had been at work ahead, and in course of time Poro was reached. Here the carpenters took up the running, and were busy erecting station yards and buildings, for this was to be the first important township centre on the route of the railway. Great glee was manifested on the part of the settlers when there was a prospect of the first section being ready for opening.

Stopford felt the benefit of the peaceful invasion, and the shopkeepers and tradespeople reaped the benefit, especially as the large quantity of provisions needed by such a number of workmen were purchased in the locality. Unhappily, on pay-days a great deal of money was spent in liquor. Many of the navvies' cheques soon disappeared in the publican's till, while those who represent the liquor trade had overwhelming evidence abroad of the character of the goods they manufactured on the premises. The policemen had plenty to do, and the lock-up was soon filled, until the justices or magistrate held a special sitting of the court, inflicted the usual fine, and the men were discharged, and returned to get another cheque for the next "shicker-up." They usually returned to the works fly-blown.

Gradually the line forged ahead. The first section was opened, and the ballast train soon had a passenger car attached to it, and the settlers could ride five or six miles to the market in the train. Poro was passed, and swamps had to be drained ere the line could go across. The whistle of the ballast train could be heard at the settlement of Bugle, which possessed a boarding-house, a blacksmith's shop, store, butcher's shop, two or three dwellings, in addition to a large number of tents occupied by those employed on the construction works. The line was open thus far for traffic.

The arrival of the first train at Bugle marked the

completion of a further section on the Stopford-Overton railway, and the incident was made the occasion of a formal opening. A great crowd gathered to see the train steam into the little wayside station.

Bugle was *en fête*. It was making history. Its name had been unknown before, but now it was painted on the end of the goods shed, and across the little lean-to station, which was to shelter passengers and serve the dual purpose of a waiting-room.

"Bugle! Bugle!" shouted the guard, as the train drew alongside the platform.

There is always something interesting to see in the opening of a new length of railway, and new country can be traversed. At the same time it gives the holiday-maker some idea of what it means to build a railway. The opening to Bugle was particularly entertaining, because it was there that the line deviated, and turned to the left, through country where it was never expected to see a railway. A coach ran from Bugle away back. The drive was very enjoyable in the summer, passing through interesting country, but in the winter at times the roads were atrocious, and avoided. The roads were cut up very badly, and many of the holes were nearly three feet in depth. It was with the greatest difficulty that traffic over the Tuku saddle was maintained during the winter months. The saddle was situated on the main road, the coach-road to away back, and had to carry a deal of traffic both ways. It had never been metalled, and various reasons were assigned to this, chiefly because it was intended to tunnel through from a point some distance nearer Bugle. This would necessitate a tunnel of several chains in length, but, once the work was put through, the difficulties of winter travelling from Bugle as far as Atmore would be overcome. Roads led off from the main road in all directions to the different settlements, and all the traffic in the future would come through Bugle.

Bugle was out for a holiday, and navvies and workmen joined in the festivities.

CHAPTER VIII

" WORTHY OF THE V.C."

" Pluck wins ! It always wins ! Though days be slow
And nights be dark 'twixt days that come and go,
Still pluck will win ; its average is sure.
He gains the prize who will the most endure ;
Who faces issues ; he who never shirks ;
Who waits and watches, and who always works."

—J. B. GOODE.

It was dinner-time when Ralph reached the site of the gravel or ballast pit. The boss of the gang (whom he discovered to be the foreman, or man placed in charge) soon made himself known.

" Better get your tent fixed up this afternoon, and be ready to start work in the morning," said the foreman. " What's your name ? " he asked.

" Messenger—Ralph Messenger."

" Right you are. My name is Thornley—Jim Thornley. I'm what is known as the ganger, or boss, or, in plain English, the man who is in charge of the job."

Ralph soon selected a high, dry, and sheltered spot for his tent. It was a great experience for the " new chum," and he found that he readily procured what he needed. The men on the works were supplied with timber for the tents, chimneys, and other conveniences. The wooden floor was made out of boards supplied for the purpose, and then the ridge-pole and frame were erected. Over this the calico was stretched, and finally a second calico, called a " fly," was made taut over the whole. Then he had his " bunk," or wooden bedstead to erect.

The shades of evening were fast falling by the time Ralph had erected his calico house. " Now for a cup of tea," he exclaimed, and away he went at full speed

to the creek with his new bucket, and speedily returned with ample sparkling mountain water—cool and refreshing. Fixing a fireplace near the door of his tent, in a shady place, he lighted his first fire, and waited until the billy boiled. The "tui's" and native birds were singing their evening hymns, ere the darkness closed in.

Ralph was ready for his tea, which he heartily enjoyed. He proudly surveyed his new calico ten-by-ten home, and having washed up the dishes and made his bed, he turned into "blanket-land," wondering what awaited him on the morrow. Such was the experience of the "new chum."

He awoke early, considerably refreshed, and found the scenery very beautiful and surroundings healthy; the ballast camp was some distance from the main line of railway, and an engine and specially prepared trucks were used to haul the gravel out of the pits. Ralph found his duty was to help to fill the trucks with gravel. Eight or nine trucks were used for each ballast train. This was called "a rake." One lot was always in the pit being filled while the full ones were being hauled away, so that the men in the pit were fully employed. Their first duty was to keep the ballast train going. Then the concrete blocks for lining the tunnels further ahead were all made at the ballast pit, and when set, and needed, were sent by truck to their destination. The huge boulders were also used, and, after being "spauled" (broken), were trucked to different parts of the line to make walls, or fascines, to strengthen where a wash-out was likely to occur. Ralph found about twenty or thirty other men employed at the pit. Some of them were married, and had their wives and families with them in the camp. They enjoyed it, and the children were ruddy and the picture of health, as there was plenty of fresh air, and good water rendered the camp invaluable service. The pit was really part of the river-bank, and the turbulent, icy waters of the Atea river, in the making, rushed over its rocky, bouldery bed in apparent eagerness to reach the mighty ocean. Over on the right

was a small charming patch of native bush, and nestling at its base the calico tents made a picturesque picture. Shriek! goes the whistle. "She's coming!" And in a few minutes the ballast engine, with her "rake" of empty trucks, shunts into the pit, and hauls the full ones away, which are in readiness. So the work goes on, week in and week out. Ralph put in about a year at this, making himself generally useful.

About this time an announcement appeared in the *Stopford Chronicle* that a branch of the St. John's Ambulance Association was to be formed, and that Dr. Morris would give a course of lectures for men in the Forester's Hall, if sufficient inducement offered, and would like all interested to meet him. Ralph Messenger went, and made one of the number required. He soon got immensely interested. The doctor gave a general outline of the structure and functions of the human body, and a description of the bones, muscles, arteries, and veins; the functions of the circulation, respiration, and of the nervous system, which Ralph followed intently. He threw himself into the exercises with a vim and a go, and was constantly questioning himself about the right kind of bandages and terms used, or about the general direction of the main arteries, indicating the points where the circulation may be arrested by digital pressure, or by the application of a tourniquet; the difference between arterial, venous, and capillary bleeding, and the various temporary means of arresting it.

There were also lectures on fractures, and first aid to be rendered in such accidents, the application of splints, or other restraining apparatus; and the first aid to those suffering collapse from injury, to those stunned; to the apoplectic, inebriated, epileptic, fainting. The immediate treatment of the apparently drowned, or otherwise suffocated, etc., he was specially interested in. The practical demonstrations he enjoyed. He thought it a grand thing to be able to understand the best methods of lifting and carrying the sick or injured on stretchers, or the conveyance of such by rail or road in country carts,

The time was fixed for the examination to take place, and Ralph was a bit nervous, but trusted that he had done the right thing. The examiner, who came from a neighbouring town, told them to only put down short answers, and not to go wandering all over the country. Their answers must be short, direct, and pointed.

A fortnight had elapsed when he received a letter informing him that he had passed, and would receive his certificate in due course, and would be notified of the date of presentation. The weeks had gone very quickly. Dr. Morris had given his lectures clearly, and was heartily thanked for his valuable services. In reply, he stated it had been a pleasure; it was always valuable to have such knowledge, as it was hard to say when it might be needed. Knowledge cost nothing to carry, and it was always useful.

Ralph continued diligently with his work, and during his spare time was able to repair the various tools, and on wet days found constant employment under cover. One morning, following a very heavy downpour of rain, they were filling the rake, when Ralph's attention was immediately directed to a huge crack opening up.

"Look out, boys! Run! It's unsafe! She's going to slip!"

He had scarcely got the words out of his mouth when the whole face, without any warning, instantly fell. There was a scatter in all directions; but, unhappily, a young fellow named Sandy Rock was not quite quick enough to get out of the way, and was crushed by the fall of gravel against one of the trucks, and buried in the debris.

"All hands to the rescue!" called Jim Thornley, the ganger.

Everybody worked with a will to extricate their unfortunate companion. They soon discovered Sandy, who was badly crushed.

"Thank God! he is alive," said one of the men.

"Messenger! You understand ambulance work? Will you take charge of the poor fellow? Hoskings!"

Go and ring up the doctor," he shouted to one of the workmen.

Ralph soon got to work, and made a temporary stretcher, and rendered first aid. The doctor soon arrived, and ordered his immediate removal to the hospital. Dr. Morris was quickly in attendance, and diagnosed the case to be a most serious one. Having put him under chloroform, he gave him a thorough examination, and discovered his eyes to be so severely crushed that their immediate removal was necessary. Having done all that he could, he made his patient as comfortable as possible, and gave instructions that he was to be called immediately the patient began to regain consciousness.

"Where am I?" the poor fellow murmured. "Oh! I remember! Look out, boys! Run! It's coming. Crash! God help us! But where am I—in bed?"

"Yes," replied the doctor. "You've had a pretty bad smash."

"A narrow escape, Sandy, my boy," said Dr. Morris.

"But, doctor, I can't see. Have I got a bandage on my eyes?"

"Sandy, my boy! Sandy. Can you bear it? I'm sorry to tell you. You'll never be able to see again. I've done my best for you, but your eyes were so much damaged that it was impossible to save them. Sandy, God bless you!" The doctor gripped his hand.

Sandy thought for a moment, and then with tremendous heroism said—

"Doctor, I thank you for what you and the boys have done for me. It might have been worse. I'm glad I've escaped with my life. Perhaps I may be of some service yet?"

"Good-bye, Sandy," said the doctor, under deep emotion, "I must be going."

He met the matron in the corridor of the hospital, and remarked that he had never in all his experience as a doctor seen such heroism. Sandy was worthy of the Victoria Cross! His case aroused considerable

public interest, and evoked sympathy not only in the construction camps, but right through the countryside, and a large sum of money was raised for his benefit. The doctor's story touched a chord in the hearts of many, which vibrated throughout the community. Sandy Rock must be provided for!

Ralph Messenger was especially commended by the doctor and the press for the way in which Sandy had been attended to prior to the medical man's arrival, and declared that Sandy owed his life to Ralph's skill in rendering first aid. Ralph replied that he had only done his duty, and it had been a privilege. The *Chronicle* honoured him in the following words, which they declared were a true facsimile—

"A kindly word and a kindly deed,
A helpful hand in time of need,
With a strong, true heart
To do his part—
Thus went the sower out with his seed,
Nor stayed in his toil to name his creed,
No coat-of-arms, no silken crest,
No purple or linen about his breast.
But royally true
To the purpose in view
Was his ceaseless search and his constant quest,
For suffering souls in need of rest.
Feeling for others, bearing their pain,
Freeing the fetters, undoing the chain;
From sorrow and tears
He wrought the bright years—
Still unknown to rank, and unknown to fame,
In letters of light God writeth his name."

Sandy Rock, to the surprise of the doctor and his many friends, clung tenaciously to life, and it was reported that he was to leave the hospital at the end of the month. He declared his intention of earning his own living, and decided to enter the Jubilee Blind Institution, Auckland, and learn wicker-work, and thus occupy his time and earn his living at the same time. An opening was found for him in the institution,

where his pluck and determination, together with his cheery disposition and contented mind, soon made him a great favourite. He soon began to feel with his fingers, and his sense of touch quickly rendered him capable of making wicker-ware for the market.

So far, the railway line had been constructed through fairly level country, and the news was brought to the ballast pit that it had reached the township of Bugle, and was ready to be opened for passenger traffic. They were to down tools for the day, and run the brake, and bring the settlers from ballast pit town to join in the celebration. Mr. Christopher Dobelling, M.P., was there, and in the absence of a Minister of the Crown, performed the ceremony of declaring the line open for traffic. The settlers were then able to use this length, and their back country was brought into touch with civilisation, and revenue brought in. Loaded trucks of wool and firewood, with their produce, were daily conveyed by rail to the nearest market. The route of the line here entered some swamp country, and became more difficult in construction. Huge drains were dug on either side of the proposed track, and the first big cutting was encountered and undertaken. Many tons of earth were removed, for the hill was scarcely high enough for a tunnel, and as the material ejected was needed for making embankments, the latter was decided upon. Working down a big cutting is arduous work, but by means of trucks and horses it is soon accomplished. The work proceeded steadily and the working down of the big cutting, the largest yet undertaken, was interesting. This class of work was especially exciting. A commencement was here made by putting a small drive into the hill. Into this the rails were laid for the trucks to run upon. A hole was then made overhead, into which soil and debris was allowed to slide. The trucks, when full, were drawn by horses, which, after starting, were quickly unhooked. Once going, the truck gathers momentum, and automatically tips itself. It is then returned again and again by the horses and again and again tipped in like manner, until the work is completed.

This device is called " the Chinaman," because it was a Chinaman who is credited with being the first to introduce it into New Zealand. The material taken out of these cuttings was usually needed for filling up gullies and making embankments on either side, and thousands of tons of earth were shifted in this way. The sides of the cutting had a sloping battery, being very wide at the top and much narrower at the bottom. Sometimes this work was carried on by night as well as day, as only a limited number of men can work in a cutting, and it usually blocked further advancement at the front. Quite frequently heavy rails and material had to be dragged over these hills to enable the work to proceed on the other side. When this had to be done, great expense was incurred, as well as loss of time.

Ralph was now changed from the ballast pit to navvy work, and came in contact with a different class of men, so he had to move his camp again. He missed the little Sunday School which a devoted Christian worker of Stopford had started. But more hands were needed at the cutting, and Ralph was selected to take charge of a gang of men.

CHAPTER IX

THE SEAMY SIDE OF LIFE

"Duke's son, cook's son, son of a hundred kings—
Each of 'em doing his country's work."

—RUDYARD KIPLING.

WORK was continued night and day by means of shifts, because this hill blocked further advancement. With the completion of a section, camps were moved onward and onward until the whole was completed. The work in the summer was by no means unpleasant, but the unmetalled portions of the "service" road got into a terrible state in the winter—horses were bogged almost daily, sometimes for several hours. The by-roads in and from the main road towards Weeden's Camp were still worse, horses even being killed through being bogged. The roads were almost impassable. The settlers, generally speaking, bore all these drawbacks with real good-nature, however, and entertained both themselves and any chance visitor who came along with many little yarns of their experiences in the mud.

"Mud, mud, mud, mud—
More mud, mud, mud ;
Mud, mud, mud, mud—
More mud, mud, mud."

The railway opened up a lot of back-country, and although much of the land immediately adjoining the line did not appear to be altogether suited for dairying, owing to its ruggedness, it was excellent sheep country. Dairying was, however, being carried on, and some of the farmers were so well advanced in their methods that they even had milking machines installed. They experienced great difficulty in conveying their milk to the creameries, owing to the deplorable state of the roads they had to traverse. The night

and day shifts were kept fully employed, and soon made a way through the opposing hill, and eventually opened up the settlement of Roa, in the valley beyond.

Calico houses and tents were soon seen in all directions. Excellent progress had been made during the last twelve months, notwithstanding the fact that that portion of the line which had been under construction during the period had been of a very heavy nature, possibly the heaviest that had yet been met with that side of Crowley Camp. To show how progress was made from Roa Camp to the Kura Camp, a distance of seventeen miles, it is interesting to record that about seven to eight hundred men were employed. On this length two tunnels had to be constructed, one a few miles beyond Roa Camp, and one at Kura Camp. Batch after batch of men kept coming from all parts to help on the work. Most of the men were married, and had their wives and families with them, and worked on the co-operative system, being formed into parties of varying strength, according to the nature of the work on which they were engaged. Three shifts of eight hours were worked in the tunnels. As a whole, the men engaged on the works were a hardworking lot. Occasionally, as is the case on all works of this nature, some of the men would set out for a drunken spree, and then for two or three days afterwards matters were not so peaceful as they should have been. This generally occurred immediately after pay-day. The men were paid once a month, and many of them appeared to be thrifty, and did not hesitate to express their disgust at the behaviour of mates who, in the course of a few hours, squander what has taken them months to earn. An important factor in the construction camps was pay-day. Several thousands of pounds were paid away monthly to the co-operative workers. On a Saturday night, following pay-day, drunkenness was at times appalling, and free fights were quite common, and some of the women played a prominent part in these disturbances.

Ralph found that all sorts and conditions of men are to be met with in the construction camps—University

men, men of mark and learning, men of letters, masters of art, bachelors of art, doctors of law—all sorts and conditions of men, from the highest to the lowest. Very frequently he found splendid fellows. On the other hand, he found those of whom it was said—"Would not like to meet a bloke like that after dark," as one of the lowest specimens of humanity passed into his tent in the bush.

Ralph had met these contrasts. Some of the grandest and noblest men and women, who like the life, and who, because little capital is needed at the start, commence their Colonial life in this way. Some like it to such an extent that they move from one part of New Zealand to another as the works are completed, or as others are started.

The engineer expressed himself as highly pleased with the character of the work done by Ralph and his men, and moved them, when the cutting was completed, further along to the section about sixteen miles from Stopford. This section was to go through swampy country, and necessitated a very considerable amount of drainage work. Heavy material was being used—in fact, everything in the construction is of the heaviest, and the bridges and culverts, too, are capable of carrying a ninety-ton engine if this should ever be necessary. The grade for some miles is very slight, three or four inches to the chain being about the average, until the first tunnel is reached. So that work could progress on both sides of the hill, and at each end of the tunnel, a light set of rails was laid over the top of the hill, and material could be hauled over for use. In this way, hundreds of men were kept fully employed. The ground on the Roa side of the hill was very heavy, and, owing to its tendency to slip, made the work difficult. For instance, one day the cutting immediately at the mouth of the tunnel slipped for a couple of chains, and for a time blocked the progress of the work entirely. The total height of the saddle above the tunnel was 155 feet, and the dimensions of the tunnel itself 13 feet across the bottom of the formation; at a height of 7 feet

it widened out to 17 feet, and then narrowed again until at 11 feet its width was reduced to 13 feet 9 ins. Its total height was 17 feet 1 inch. The concrete work was carried out in lengths of 16 feet 6 ins., the timber supports being driven forward as the work proceeded. The thickness of the concrete on the one side was eighteen inches, but at the other end, where the country consists of papa, it was reduced to fourteen inches. Good progress was made at both ends of the tunnel, in which about sixty men were engaged.

The entrance presented a massive appearance. From the tunnel the line fell rapidly, the grade being about one in fifty for a mile and a half. This particular length included some of the heaviest railway formation in New Zealand. One filling alone represented thousands and thousands of yards of material.

The front of railway construction absorbed many strange classes of people. Here one had life, and met different types of humanity. What is life? In this case it was a cosmopolitan mass of all sorts and conditions of men and women, of all nations and tongues, creeds, and sects. Men with strange histories one met with in these camps, men who had got as low down as they could possibly get in the centre of civilisation, and who were now trying to retrieve their positions; men who bore the brands of suffering on account of wrongdoing. Men who had been in nearly every part of the world, and tried nearly every occupation under the sun, had graduated to these works, and were now trying to earn sufficient to keep the wolf from the door. It was an interesting study to stand and watch the movements of some of these men. Some had no one belonging to them in the Dominion. One met with various nationalities, and they all could find something to do at "the Front." Some could fill trucks from the cuttings, some could drive a horse, some could cut a drain, or do a bit of stumping. Some could blast away the hard rock, or papa. Others could divert streams or creeks, scrub and fell bush, use a wheelbarrow or a handcart. Others, again, could do a bit of bridge-building or rough carpentering, by preparing

the props and scaffolding for tunnel purposes; fill in ballast trucks and make the formation ready for laying the rails. There was such a variety of work that one found amongst this flotsam and jetsam men of the highest intelligence, to those who seemed to have scarcely any brains at all. A great deal more brains and intelligence were needed than most people are aware of in such work. There is an art in handling the navvy's pick and shovel, and if there is anyone who thinks otherwise let him have a try. The capable navvy is one of the most important men we have in the country. He does not drive in his motor car, he does not dress in broadcloth, nevertheless he is one of a country's greatest wealth producers. What would be the good of railway loans or loans for bridges, or loans for opening up the away-back, if we had not the man with the shovel? Sometimes some peculiar meetings took place on these works, unexpectedly. Fellows who have parted in different parts of the world, and never expected to meet again, come across each other on these works, in some instances in a strange fashion.

Success does not always come to those who deserve it. With some it was a venture that might be successful or not; the future could only tell. But when a man felt he was ready and willing to do honest and hard manual work, as Ralph Messenger was, he was bound to come out right in the end. The majority of the men were strong and healthy, and many of them were very handy—men who would not flinch from the burden of the day; men anxious for the opportunity to put forth their energies. Some men worked in pairs, and did well together. They did the same class of work. They shared the same tent, and halved the work of keeping it in order.

Amongst the University men that Ralph met with was Tommy Burrows, who had studied for the law until drink got the better of him, and he had gambled away his profession; and when his name was mentioned in the town, men shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads. They knew he was drifting to ruin as fast as he could. There was only one ending, and that was

loss, disaster, and failure. He was a master of the pick and shovel brigade. Then there was Bill Harris, the son of well-to-do people in the Homeland. His father had started him on a good farm, but he played the fool, and got through it—drank like a fish, it was stated, and nearly broke his mother's heart. He was given sufficient to convey him to New Zealand to try and make a fresh start, and here he was pushing a wheelbarrow at the "Front." Another case of drink. There was Sam Dugdale. He was intended for the Church, and studied for Holy Orders, and got within reach of his first cure when too much drink upset his equilibrium and brought him into disgrace, and here he was helping to push on the twin rails.

George Stephenson was intended for the Civil Service, and studied hard, hoping to take his degree, and receive an important position in India, but—the same old story, brilliant talent and ability wasted through drink. Tragedy after tragedy was unfolded to Ralph Messenger, as he got to know the men. The quantity of "might-have-beens" was tremendous. Many a "tent" could tell a history.

When away from the drink, such men were decent fellows, and made valuable citizens. But they went under because of false notions of Society. Custom wrecked them; and custom said, when they were down, "Leave them alone." They were weak-minded, and thus thousands of men and women of brilliancy, on account of liquor, go under every year. However, many splendid fellows work on the Railway Construction Works, and happily the vast majority are men that one can feel proud of. Here was old Donald McIvor, a worthy old Scot, with a son in the Christian ministry. The atmosphere of his tent was as the fragrant rose. He was one of God's gentlemen. But he was only there until a bridge was completed, and he returned to his work in the city. Then there was that good Salvation Army brother, who was not ashamed of his colours. At the end of his first day's work, while he was preparing for bed, he pulled out his little Bible, and commenced to read, as was his custom.

"Boys," he said, "I'd like to read you a chapter out of this book before we turn in. What do you say?"

A roar of laughter greeted this question, but they finally consented to give him a hearing. He read the story of the Prodigal Son, and then said he would like to sing to them.

"Right-O! Go ahead."

He sang, "I love to tell the Story." As he sang they listened, and they were deeply touched. He then asked them to repeat with him a little prayer they had learned at their mother's knee. And they all reverently repeated The Lord's Prayer.

They did not pretend to be saints. Many could say, I may not have been a fool in that respect, but I may have been a fool in some other. No; they were not all hard cases on the works, and even the hard cases had a "soft spot," if it could be found. There was splendid material waiting to be influenced. Ralph Messenger remembered that it was the rankest soil, when brought under cultivation, that often produced the best crop. Here was an opportunity, and a sphere of usefulness for some one to step into. Would they seize it, and utilise it? Time would tell.

CHAPTER X

RALPH MESSENGER'S RESOLVE

"Be just, fear not; let all the ends thou aim'st at be for thy country, thy God's, and Truth."

RALPH MESSENGER was intensely interested in the periodical visits paid by Mr. Glasson, the engineer, to the works. From time to time he watched him measuring up the quantity of work done, and also his way and manner of putting in the levels, and laying out the work for the different gangs. He wished he could do it! But how could he? He had never had a chance. One night after work he was reading in his tent about the achievements of youth, and that youth was the only time to think and decide on a great course, and manhood with action followed: that it was dreary to have to alter one's whole life in age—the time past, and the strength gone. Everything from the foundation of the world had been crying for "young blood"; this world of ours wanted the explosiveness and enthusiasm of youth to explore her regions, where lie buried treasures of ages; to espouse new enterprises; to lead forlorn hopes; and, like a forester with a newly sharpened axe, to walk on over fallen trees, and feel, as he goes on and the chips fly: "Behind me is a race wanting to get through these thickets; I chop, and chop away; I chop for them; I chop for everybody that ever shall walk this road; they are coming behind me, and I go on and on." What has not been accomplished by youth?

At fifteen, Victor Hugo presented a poem to the Academy; at sixteen, Leigh Hunt was a prolific writer of verses; at seventeen, Michael Angelo had a room in the Palace of Lorenzo de Medici; at eighteen, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was pastor of a congrega-

tion; at nineteen, George Stephenson was carrying in his brain an improved steam-engine; at twenty, Alexander mounted the throne. Barnum began the race of business barefoot, for, at the age of fifteen, he was obliged to buy on credit the shoes he wore at his father's funeral. He was a remarkable example of success under difficulties. There was no keeping him down; no opposition daunted him; no obstacles were too great for him to overcome. Ruined at fifty, and heavily in debt, he triumphed in the end. A poor Irish lad, so pitted with small-pox that boys made sport of him, earned his living by writing ballads for street musicians. Fourpence a day was all he could earn. But, in spite of Fortune's frowns and his own weakness, he won success and fame. The world, which so often comes too late with its assistance and laurels, gave to "The weak, gentle, loving author of 'The Vicar of Wakefield'" a monument in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey. David Livingstone, at ten years of age, was put into a cotton factory near Glasgow. Out of his first week's wages he bought a Latin grammar, and studied in the night schools for years. He would sit up and study till midnight, unless his mother drove him to bed, notwithstanding he had to be at the factory at six in the morning.

What has not been accomplished by youth?

Ralph was immensely stirred when he had finished reading this article. He jumped up, stamped his foot, and exclaimed, "What others have done I can do, and will do! I'll be an engineer, like Mr. Glasson! But how?"

One day he solved the problem. Amongst the papers wrapped around his stores he read, "We can help you to improve your position." He found it an advertisement in connection with the "International Correspondence Schools," containing a syllabus of the subjects taught, and rapidly glanced down the list. "Kapai! Just the very thing!" he ejaculated. "'Structural Engineering, Bridge Engineering, etc., taught by correspondence.' Splendid! I will send for further

information. I'll do it before I go to bed," he added to himself.

He put his resolve into action, and in the course of a few days he received a budget of information, which he eagerly read until he came to—

"There is no need for a student to leave his present occupation—he can study in his spare time, by mail, until he is ready to take a higher position with his own firm, or change his occupation. Thus the man or lad in the backblocks has the same chances as in the city. The student has his own text-books and printed lessons always at hand for reference. He is a class in himself. There is no need to waste time, energy, and money going out to class. Immediately he is ready in the early evening, he can sit down and work as long as he pleases from his printed lessons. His corrected work is promptly returned with full written criticisms and corrections, which may always be referred to. The International Correspondence Schools furnish a means of education to the young man who has arrived at an age somewhat beyond that time at which he would be properly suited in, say, a technical school. It enables a young man to acquire a betterment, not only for himself, but also for his employer and his country."

"That's A1," said Ralph.

"Some men are ambitious to amass great wealth, others to provide comforts and luxuries for themselves and their families; or perhaps there is some pet hobby, the unlimited indulgence in which appears above all things desirable. But underlying and at the root of almost all ambition we find a yearning for power; power to plan, to organize, and to command."

"That's me," said Ralph.

"We have raised thousands to such positions. We can raise you. Training will help you to become—will, in fact, make you a leader. Mark the subject in which you are interested and post the card to-day. Positions of power have been gained through the I.C.S. One of our students worked in a stone quarry as a labourer. He now earns over £4 10s. per week. 'It is a profitable

investment,' said a Civil Engineering pupil of four year's standing, 'and I would emphatically impress on any person the great advantage and assistance derived from your course of study, especially so to any who would like to become proficient in engineering.' It is simple, thorough, explicit, and up-to-date in every detail."

Ralph was almost overjoyed. "The very thing I have been groping after for years." He read on—

"Join this ever-increasing army—do as they have done, and ask us to help you carve out a career. The lower ranks are crowded everywhere, but there is always room higher up, because the men there are constantly on the move. Post the card now, and learn how to better your position and increase your earnings."

Ralph acted on the suggestion, and in the course of a few days he received a budget of information, which he eagerly read. As a result he entered for the course, received his books and papers, and set to work. He was delighted with the study, and as the weeks and months went by, he gradually imbibed wider knowledge of his subject. His was a four years' course, and the time of his first examination rapidly drew near. Would he be plucked? Or would he go through?

The papers were at last sent away, and a few weeks elapsed. Then one day he received a letter in the usual well-known envelope. He opened it with fear and trembling. What was the news?

"It is my pleasing duty to inform you that you have passed your examination with honour. On behalf of the examiner, I congratulate you.

Faithfully yours,

SECRETARY, I.C.S., LTD."

On receipt of this piece of information he humbly went and knelt at his bedside, and thanked God for his success.

Ralph was now busily employed. The length of construction he was in charge of was through a huge swamp. In several places up the valley, road diversions

had to be carried out in order to facilitate the formation, but these had the effect of improving the road, giving better grades and a straighter run. In several places creeks or small streams had to be diverted, which would be of benefit to the farmers, as drains had previously to be made which drain the whole of the swamp. It was a wet, dirty job, the work being anything but pleasant. The men in the very worst places were provided with gum-boots, but these were of little use to the men, as the mud and water were too deep, and got over the tops. Much of the country was low-lying and liable to flood, but by means of extensive protection works the line would be made safe from any trouble in this direction.

When Ralph and his men knocked off at night they were usually very wet and dirty. However, the work had to be done and he did not complain, as he was anxious to get a thorough knowledge of every branch of railway construction. After a good wash, a change of clothing, a good tea, and a warm fire the miscomforts of the day were soon forgotten. Mr. Glasson, the engineer, from time to time noticed how interested Ralph Messenger was in his work, and in a conversation Ralph had with him one day, when a chance word was dropped, he discovered that he was hoping some day to be an engineer himself, and that he was taking a course of study in civil engineering.

From that time onward, Mr. Glasson took a greater interest in Ralph, and explained the manner of taking levels, how to measure the depth of cuttings, the quantity of stuff needed for the fillings and embankments, or the amount of drain excavations to be made. He also showed him plans of future work, including the construction of tunnels and bridge-building. On wet days, Mr. Glasson gave Ralph permission to look over his work and copy, and also to draw plans by himself in his office.

Ralph kept himself severely to himself, and had no time for card-playing, two-up, drinking, or gambling at nights or on wet days. He had not forgotten his previous resolve, when, on that memorable night,

he went out of "Peter Thompson's" Mission a changed man. He would never forget it, and he resolved anew, when entering the railway construction camps, that he would "keep himself straight." He always kept before him the loftiest grandest ideal of what a young man's life ought to be—the Life of Jesus of Galilee. Every night he read out of the grandest "young man's Book"—the Bible, and learned again and again its greatest story of a young man—Jesus Christ. He felt there were heights and depths and latitudes of being in Him, of which our finite minds can only have the feeblest apprehension; nevertheless, He stands in sacred history an ideal for the present, and the generations of youths yet unborn, of what a young man ought to be.

Ralph Messenger felt all this, and realised that Jesus Christ is still the young man's own Brother, and that He stands immeasurably higher than those who have risen and emblazoned their names upon the scroll of fame, or whose memories are "mossed and ivied" in the grateful hearts of a nation. Sometimes he thought of the Homeland, where he had spent his boyhood days—of his mother, and her last words, "Be a good boy," and how she had died; sometimes he pondered on his arrest, and the mystery of it all. Would it ever be solved? And what of his father? Had drink killed him? Was he living? If so, had he reformed? Then, how was it that he had been arrested? Why were his ideals shattered just when the prize and success seemed within his grasp? Would he ever know? Were God's promises really true? Did all things work together for good? God knew he was innocent, and that his conscience was clear. But who was the culprit? Some one must have done it. He would like to fathom it, but— And again he sighed, and tried to banish it from his memory. "Sometime we'll understand," the good old Book says. "I will leave it at that," he concluded. When such thoughts came into his mind he usually drowned them by plunging more fervently into his task of self-improvement.

Ralph Messenger realised that life is a constant

battle of right against wrong, and that nothing short of God's grace will so nerve us to play the man as familiarity with brave deeds and loyal integrity of those men and women of whom the Apostle Paul says "the world is not worthy." He often thought of his experiences coming over the rolling sea. What had become of Frank Templeton? Would he ever cross his path again? Then he remembered Jacob Chambers and Harry Champness, and their open-air meetings on the deck of the *Rinthic*. They were somewhere in the Dominion. He wondered what they were doing, and whether he would ever come across them? He must be low-spirited to-night, surely. He could not study.

"What's that! Surely I must be getting nervous!"

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" He rushed to the tent door, and sure enough, there was a fire. Away he went!

"It's Crockett's Boarding House, with the cook house!" shouted some one.

Ralph was one of the first on the scene.

"It appears that Mr. Crockett and all are out, except a five-year-old child!" shouted one of the neighbours. "They had difficulty in making their escape, owing to the strong hold the fire had. Mrs. Crockett has just rushed in to try and rescue it."

"Where are they?" cried Ralph, to the by-standers.

"In that division on the left," was the reply.

"Have rugs and a stretcher ready!" cried Ralph to those around. "Come on, men! There is no time to be lost!"

Leading the men onward, he rushed into the burning building, but they were driven back by the smoke and flames.

"Let's have another try through the window!"

At it they went, and at last succeeded in entering the room, and found the heroic mother and child.

Picking up the woman in his strong arms, Ralph Messenger rushed out, one of the men following with the child.

CHAPTER XI

THE CHRISTIAN

"And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."

—Acts of the Apostles, xi, 26.

"CLEAR the course ! Bring the stretcher and covering ! Keep the air from the wounds ! " cried Messenger.

They reverently placed the sufferers on the quickly improvised bed.

"Now, men ! Carry them under cover as quickly as you can. You women, help me to get bandages, and plenty of salad, sweet or linseed oil. Ladies, help me to remove the clothing. Carefully, So ! Don't pull it. If it sticks, put some oil on to soften it. Use the scissors."

To others he said, " Help me to get everything in readiness to apply the bandages as soon as the clothing is removed. Mrs. Simpson, please mix me equal parts of oil and lime-water. This will form carron oil."

The mother was made as comfortable as possible, and Ralph turned to the child. Little Ruby Crockett, on examination, proved to be severely and badly burned. Ralph, however, did what he could to ease the pain, and rendered first aid until the doctor who had been summoned arrived.

Mrs. Crockett, he said, was suffering principally from shock, and might recover ; but little Ruby's recovery was doubtful. They must be kept perfectly quiet. As far as could be gathered, the bursting of a kerosene lamp was the cause of the mishap, and the building was quickly enveloped. Mrs. Crockett, on rushing into the building, was evidently overcome, and but for the bravery of Ralph Messenger, both of them would have perished in the flames. The doctor was much pleased with the way first aid had been rendered, and said so. Great sympathy was expressed

for the unfortunate family, who lost everything, and a subscription list was soon opened on the works and amongst the camps for their benefit, and a considerable sum was collected.

The sufferers were removed by special train to the hospital. For many days the angel of death hovered near them, and their lives hung in the balance. Ruby's strong constitution and youth stood her in good stead, and under God's Providence she recovered.

They were nearly well enough to leave the hospital when the news was brought to them that it was intended to give them a "Welcome Home." That the men had not forgotten, their kindness in looking after their needs was evident; for they all clubbed together and re-erected the Boarding House, so that the family could return to their old business. The railway construction men had a tender spot, although many were diamonds in the rough. They felt that they could not forget Ralph Messenger's noble action, and communicated with the Royal Humane Life-Saving Society a full account of his heroism. In due time they received word that the Society, in recognition, was awarding their medal for his meritorious act. This was to be ready for presentation at the "Welcome Home," and everything was in readiness.

A large woolshed belonged to one of the settlers close by the construction camp, and he had been kind enough to place it at their disposal for the occasion. Mr. Christopher Dobelling, M.P. for the district, had been asked to be present, also the Mayor of Stopford, the Engineer-in-charge, and other distinguished settlers. The whole of the construction camps were present. Ralph, hearing of what was in the air, expressed his intention of not being present, because he had "only done his duty," he said. His movements, however, were watched all that day, and an eye kept on his doings. The pickets took good care that he did not leave the works, and about half-past seven that evening a contingent of men arrived outside his door, and gave him a quarter of an hour to be in readiness to accompany them to the woolshed.

" Messenger, you've either got to hurry up, or we'll come in and take you by force ! " shouted Dan Stephenson.

" Hear ! Hear ! " echoed the company.

Ralph saw that they meant business, and were out for the night, so he had to reluctantly capitulate, change his clothes, and make ready to accompany them. He no sooner put his head outside his tent than he was seized and hoisted shoulder high, and carried along in the direction of the meeting house, the boys singing as they marched along to the accompaniment of the concertina—

" See the conquering hero comes."

He was ultimately landed in the building, and chaired to the platform, amidst the tumultuous cheers and applause of those assembled. When order was restored, the chairman called upon Mr. Dobelling to make the presentation.

It gave him great pleasure, he said, to be present, and to have the honour of making public acknowledgement of heroic conduct rendered, and in the absence of His Excellency the Governor, he asked Mr. Messenger to step forward.

Ralph did so.

" ' Greater love hath no man than that he lay down his life for his friend.' Mr. Messenger had done this, and proved himself worthy of the name of Christian. You are a credit to your King and country, Mr. Messenger, and I congratulate you on your bravery."

When silence had been gained, Ralph thanked them, and stated he had only done his duty, and said : " ' I expect to pass through this world once ; if there is any good that I can do, let me do it now, for I shall not pass this way again.' "

Mrs. Crockett and Ruby were congratulated on their restoration, and the key of the new boarding house was presented to them, along with a purse of sovereigns, with which to buy necessary articles needed to replace those lost in the fire. The whole proceedings were most enthusiastic, showing " that

one touch of human sympathy makes all the world akin."

After this, Ralph went about his work as usual. On Sunday he kept himself aloof, and avoided wood-chopping, washing of clothes, etc. He read his Bible or a good book, and became known as "The Christian." When this reached his ears he became immensely interested. The name itself was full of interest, and he found it originated in apostolic times. "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." Heretofore they had borne the name of "Nazarene," but now it is changed, and in the small sentence we have an important and interesting item, "called Christians."

Ralph became intensely interested, especially as it had now been bestowed on him—"The Christian." He began to analyse. "What is a Christian?" The question itself aroused his curiosity. Hall Caine had just startled the world of literature by the intrusion into its ranks of a novel entitled "The Christian." This had been reviewed and re-reviewed, many characterising it as a work of supreme genius, of genius inspired and hallowed by a deathless human sympathy. Ralph read it, and found that it had been published and re-published, not only in book form, but in newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. He found it a work of fiction steeped in Gospel truth, and causing a world-wide interest. And now he himself was dubbed "The Christian" by the railway construction workers. Was he a real Christian? He asked himself the question again, "What is a Christian?" And the answer came. A Christian is a Christ-man, and includes four things, at least. One who has learned about Christ; One who trusts to Christ for the forgiveness of his sins; One who resembles Christ in his life; One who gives to Christ his entire heart in lasting love.

He began to analyse a little further. What is a Christian? The answer came again—A Christian is a follower of Christ. A Christ-like man or a Christ-like woman. This means that I, Ralph Messenger, am to be a copy of Christ—a miniature Christ. Then he remembered that Mr. W. T. Stead, a few years pre-

viously, had stated in London, that "we must all be Christ's if we would Christianise the world, or even the Church." Ralph saw that it was an advantage to be a Christian, and that it was an advantage to be the best Christian possible, for a Christian can only be a true lady or gentleman. Again Ralph found that a Christian "is one wedded to Christ." He went further into the subject, and saw that religion consisted not as many vainly imagine in wearing a black coat and white tie, reading prayers and preaching sermons in churches, which are more or less full of professing Christians, who from childhood read in their Bibles or heard in their churches of the way of salvation, but in a surrender to Jesus Christ as a rebel to a king—in accepting His free gift of pardon and salvation bought by His own death on the cross for the individual, and enlisting in His army to bring this lost world to the knowledge of salvation, vowing and giving utter obedience to a Commander who never made, nor can make, a mistake. Ralph went into the subject more fully, and found that the present-day religion may be, and is too often, an effeminacy, a mere parody of the religion of Jesus Christ and the heroic obedience, self-sacrifice, and valour of His early and true disciples.

Then, said Ralph to himself, true religion is Paul's life lived over again—a grand heroism, the manliest and noblest of all pursuits and professions. And what was needed is not a mere set of religious forms, but a living Saviour, Who died to take away our sins, and Who can deliver men from the power of those sins, even to which we may have been slaves in time past. Christianity is more than a set of pious opinions, which may fit us for another world: it is a life to be lived here and now—to be shown in the home; for when a man has a happy fireside he is doubly strong to fight the world's battles. A Christian should be the pleasantest man to live with. As citizens and business men, Christians should make their influence felt, by putting into practice and action the principles of the New Testament. Ralph Messenger began to immediately see that if people would only put Christianity into

their daily life, and Christian capitalists realised that they were stewards of the wealth they possessed, and wage-earners allowed Christian principles to govern their trades unions, there would be less friction between capital and labour.

Ralph further saw that our Christianity must be militant, to enable us to fight against such evils as intemperance, impurity, and the gambling spirit of our times. To enable this to be done, many qualifications are needed. Faith, not faith that God can use us, but faith that God will use us. As he read his Bible he discovered that all men from Adam downwards had been men of faith—Abraham, Moses, and all. Again, courage was needed. A man full of faith and the Holy Ghost was never lacking in courage. If he be a preacher, he will preach to please God. God's man is full of courage.

Then enthusiasm is essential ; more fire is needed in Christian work. He had read that during the American War, Phil Sheridan was worth more than ten thousand men. When it was known that Phil was to lead the corps, cheer upon cheer went along the line, and the troops were anxious to enter the fight, the reason being that their leader filled them with enthusiasm.

Ralph discovered that human sympathy is a potent factor. Convince a man that you sympathise with him, and you have largely won him. He realised that it is so easy to condemn, but Christ-like to pity, and that to-day more sermons of the hands and feet are needed. He felt greatly cheered by his study, and saw that—

" Who does the best his circumstance allows
Does well, acts nobly ; angels can do no more."

He, at any rate, resolved to so live, so act, that people should have no need to ask the question, What is a Christian ? for they would see by his life, his actions, and example, that he was indeed trying to be a " Christian "—a Christ-man.

Ralph declared he had never investigated a pleasanter

subject, and thought, How can I put it into practice? One day he saw a number of boys and girls playing and running about the hills, wild, like a lot of rabbits. Sunday was the same as any other day to them, but what could be done? What a pity there was no Sunday School! he remarked to himself. Could one be started? Who could do it? The answer came to this question—You! He acted at once, and got permission to use the dining-room of Mrs. Crockett's Calico Boarding House, and announced his first Sunday School in the following notice—

Those interested in the starting of a Sunday School for Crowley Camp are requested to meet at Mrs. Crockett's Boarding House on Sunday afternoon next at two o'clock.

R. MESSENGER, *Convener*.

The eventful afternoon arrived for the opening, and with it some twenty children of all shapes and sizes. Ralph soon got to work, and explained the object for which they had met. He asked for volunteers to assist him, and Miss Barlow, the boarding house assistant, consented. It was agreed to call it the Crowley Camp Mission School, and Ralph was constituted Superintendent. He soon gained their confidence, and taught them several hymns and short passages of Scripture. And when the children were asked, "All who will come every Sunday afternoon, put up your hands?" up went a forest of hands, and thus the Sunday School was constituted.

CHAPTER XII

A "BLOOMIN' PARSON "

" When you want to get ahead,
Dig in !
When you're up to work you dread,
Dig in !
When Dame Care comes down your way,
Days are sad instead of gay,
When there's nothing seems to pay,
Dig in !
—Selected.

ONE day Ralph discovered that a religious service was held a few miles distant once a fortnight on a Sunday morning, conducted under the auspices of the Primitive Methodist Church, and he determined to go the following Sunday morning. He enjoyed the walk. The peace, the calm of the day wherein he could turn aside from the busy scenes of life, and spend it in spiritual service, appealed to him. The singing of the birds and surroundings as he journeyed along were an inspiration. Solitude is surely a lovely thing ! It peoples the mind with lovely forms, lovely thoughts, lovely ideals. Ralph Messenger realised that if this were done, a person can never be lonely. A few moments quiet rest—idleness it might almost seem to the uninitiated—in the midst of a busy day, when the turmoil of this world seems to overcloud your sky with a sinister gloom, will lift one above the petty annoyances that hinder one's progress, so that one may proceed with a clear mind, able to separate the trifles from the essentials, and thus gain a clearer view of life and its aims.

He reached the little building in plenty of time ; he did not like to be late for church. Some people he knew said, " Better late than never " ; but his motto

was "Better never late." He noticed that people could always be in time to catch the train for a holiday, but somehow they could not be in time for worship. Plenty of time to make money, but little time to lay up treasure in heaven. In the Old Book it is stated that the people worshipped the golden calf; but now they were worshipping the "cow," which had become golden to them. The congregation was a small one, but the people were homely and hearty, and his heart glowed within him. The Rev. Hector Nelson was the preacher, and he gave a most practical, helpful sermon. The singing of the hymns stirred his soul, and he felt renewed in his inner life. The building was not of an ornate character, but it was God's house. It had been erected under great difficulties. The carting of the timber over roads axle deep with mud was no light undertaking. It had been erected in anticipation of the railway line coming through the settlement, but to the disappointment of the promoters the line had been deviated, and with the alteration of the route the special Village Settlement had not been a success from a population standpoint. Some thought that the church was now in the wrong place, owing to the changed route.

The exterior surroundings presented rather a forlorn and forsaken appearance; the fences were somewhat dilapidated, and the section overgrown with weeds and rubbish showed desertion. Ralph thoroughly enjoyed the service, and at the close made himself known to the preacher.

"Glad to see you," said Mr. Nelson. "Stranger in these parts?"

"Not exactly; but I'm on the Railway Construction Works some miles away."

"Many men employed?"

"Yes."

"Get any service?"

"No. Could you come up sometimes?" asked Ralph. "Plenty of scope for you!"

"Any place to hold service in?" asked Mr. Nelson.

"Yes. Plenty of room in the open air."

"But inside a building?"

"I suppose we could get the boarding house dining-room," replied Ralph. "Or perhaps we might hire the billiard-room."

The result of this conversation ended in Ralph, ere they separated, obtaining from Mr. Nelson a promise to visit the Construction Camps, and distribute literature, and hold meetings both inside and outside if possible.

"Drop me a note when you can come, Mr. Nelson, and I will make arrangements."

A hearty hand-grip, and the two men parted. Little did either know what possibilities and results were to come out of that chance meeting. As Ralph journeyed home to the camp he felt it a very great help to be able, week by week, to leave the busy and the troubled life, and enter into the quiet majestic temple of some great thought. He felt then in the position of the traveller, who having gone for some miles along a dusty highway, turns to one side, and climbs into some quiet, shady nook, and, by the shade of a cooling fountain, just waits and rests, and quenches his thirst, forgetting for awhile all the worries of the road beneath him, being refreshed and invigorated to continue his return journey.

That is the value to the soul of some great thought, where one can rest, in which, for a moment or two, one can be quiet, and meditate.

Ralph's mind was full of thoughts as he returned home from worship over the bush-track which led to Crowley Camp. Each Sunday he stored his mind with that knowledge which was helpful to his spiritual growth. He argued that, "A Sabbath well spent, brings a week of content."

The weeks passed quickly by, and it was towards the end of the year, just before Christmas, that Mr. Nelson wrote saying that he was coming to visit the camp as promised. Would Mr. Messenger make all the necessary arrangements?

Ralph immediately got out a notice and posted it up, announcing that the Rev. Hector Nelson would conduct an open-air on Wednesday night at seven,

and an inside meeting at Mrs. Crockett's Boarding House at half-past seven, to which all were invited. The notice attracted considerable attention, and a crowd stopped to read it as they went home from work.

"What do you think, boys? A bloomin' parson has found us out, and a notice informs us of an 'open-air' to-night."

"By golly! he'll catch it."

It was the talk of the workmen during the day, and great interest was attached to it. Out of curiosity a good crowd turned up. Hector Nelson mounted a pile of sleepers, and in a loud clear voice said—

"We shall commence our open-air meeting by singing. Mr. Messenger, will you kindly give out the hymn-sheets I have brought? Now, boys! I want you all to sing—everybody sing—

"Whosoever heareth, shout, shout the sound!
Send the blessed tidings all the world around;
Spread the joyful news wherever man is found,
Whosoever will may come."

"Sing the chorus again!" cried the speaker. "You have done well. Now the second verse. That's better. Now I'm going to pray."

Hector Nelson's whole soul went out in prayer: "God bless these men, Eternal Father. Thou knowest all about their difficulties and hardships. Help them, help them to be true men. Help to make their lives easier. Keep them, and draw them into the paths of purity. Help them to overcome every form of evil and to trust in Christ their Saviour for the forgiveness of sin. Amen."

"Now, men. I'm going to sing you a solo, and I want you all to join in the chorus—

"Grace there is my every debt to pay,
Blood to wash my every sin away,
Power to keep me spotless day by day,
For me! For me!"

When Mr. Nelson had finished the men were in tears, and they were visibly touched. He spoke a few manly

words to them, and then invited them to come along to the other meeting inside the boarding house. Many accepted the invitation, and the place was full to overflowing.

"I am going to have a talk with you on Temptation. Smooth seas and fine weather never make skilful sailors. Storms are necessary to bring out the powers, skill, and endurance. So temptation to the Christian in the voyage of life perfects the graces, ennobles the character, sustains the hopes. I want you to particularly notice that temptation is the common lot of man. Our common forefathers were assailed in Eden. Jacob was tempted by the thought of his elder brother's inheritance. Joseph was tempted to commit sin by Potiphar's wife. Job was tempted by reason of his misfortunes, David by the pride of his nation's valour, and St. Peter tempted at the time of our Lord's trial. Even our Lord and Saviour Himself was tempted in the wilderness, throughout His ministry, in the Garden of Gethsemane, on Calvary. It is possible to be tempted of God. That is, in the sense of a test for the purpose of establishing us, not for making us fall. 'Lead us not into temptation, but (except to) deliver us from evil.' In this manner God tested Abraham and Job, as well as others. Temptation comes from our fellow man, from friends, by mistaken kindness; from enemies, to secure our downfall, in the shape of taunting words, unkind thoughts, base insinuations. Then, again, temptation arises from our own evil hearts, which are ever prone to wickedness; temptation comes from Satanic influence in open acts of sin—against our faith, in form of spiritual pride—presumption. 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.' Every age has its own peculiar temptations: childhood, boyhood, youth, and manhood. These temptations are often powerful when they assail. Do you know, men, we often encourage temptation? Temptation is tempered by God. Restraining influence is placed by God upon Satan's power, as in the case of Job. This may be a parable to us, but the tempter cannot come beyond a certain point. Christ sternly rebuked the

tempter. Drastic methods are sometimes necessary. 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.' Preventing grace is a reality in the spiritual life, not a fiction of the school-men. We cannot tell how much we have been saved from by the grace of God. Every temptation has a loophole of escape. We do not always see the loophole—sometimes we are wilfully blind to it. Our Lord always had an answer for every assault. We may not always find a loophole to escape. Men! there is no dishonour in running away from Satan. The loophole is sometimes provided in an unexpected manner, but it is sometimes our business to find out and use the means provided. We cannot avoid temptation, but we must not needlessly rush into it. Temptation will easily find us, without us seeking it. It is so easy to glide into sin, to be slothful, to be weary in well-doing, to lower the standard of our Christian life. I never see a man go wrong without saying, 'There goes Hector Nelson but for the grace of God.'

"Temptation has its proper place in life. It has its effect upon character. It strengthens, it softens—makes us able to sympathise with those who are being tempted. It has its effect upon conduct. We are conformed to the image of Christ; it bears testimony to the inward belief—it brings us up to the full stature of ripened Christian manhood. God's grace is sufficient.

'He'll not let my soul be lost,
Christ will hold me fast;
Bought by Him at such a cost,
He will hold me fast.' "

The power of God was manifest, and several determined to lead a new and a better life.

"Now for the closing hymn—

'I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But ah! the waters failed;
E'en as I stooped to drink they'd fled,
And mocked me as I wailed.'

"God bless you, men! Keep straight!"

"Good-night. Come again, Parson!"

"All right," replied Mr. Nelson. "We will see what we can do."

Ralph Messenger was delighted with the meeting, and was personally much encouraged thereby. Mr. Nelson and he had a long chat about the possibilities, and the great need for Christian work to be done amongst the Construction Camps. The former's heart was touched as he saw the position.

"Sunday passed like the weekdays." The dweller in a district where the Church service comes as regular as the clock cannot realise the meaning of such a sentence. What does it mean? Suppose there was no Church? Suppose there was no Sunday? Suppose there was no God! That is what the sentence means—"Sunday passed like the weekdays." But it was not strictly accurate.

On Sunday all general work ceased. That makes a difference. On Sunday "two-up" was played as long as the light would allow. It was a day of gambling instead of work. On Saturday whisky was sent for; on Sunday the whisky was drunk, and there was no religious service. Would it not be possible to do something?

"Could not your Conference appoint a man to travel through these camps?" asked Ralph. "There are now over six hundred men employed on the works, and the camps extend over a distance of about twenty miles. Additional men are to be sent on to the works during the next few weeks from various parts of the island, where the unemployed difficulty is being most keenly felt. Think of it! Six hundred men, besides women and children, and 'Sunday passes like the weekday.'"

Mr. Nelson scarcely knew how to reply. Again and again the Executive had reported that they had no money to employ extra missionaries, even if they could send the right man.

"I will pray that God will touch the hearts of the faithful, and that the money and the man may be found, in His own good time."

CHAPTER XIII

A CRY FROM MACEDONIA

" Shall we, whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high—
Shall we, to men benighted,
The lamp of life deny ? "

—BISHOP HEBER.

" COME again, Parson ! "

These words Hector Nelson had heard in the navvies' camp kept ringing in his ears and he could not get them out of his mind. Morning, noon, and night, " Come again, Parson " confronted him.

The Station Quarterly Meeting was to be held in a few days, and the Rev. Barney Bradshaw would be there. He decided to mention the matter, and, if possible, get the meeting to pass a resolution constituting the area containing the Railway Construction Camps into another station, and ask for an agent to work amongst the men and look after that country. The Quarterly Meeting heartily and unanimously passed and endorsed Mr. Nelson's suggestion that a new station be constituted, with a request that it be occupied at once. On his return home, he communicated the resolution in his report to the Conference Official, and went over the ground and gathered further information. The G.C.D. replied that he would have pleasure in giving Mr. Nelson an opportunity of personally advocating the claim in the Conference.

The Annual Conference of the Primitive Methodist Church had just commenced its session, and had met in the Empire City, where delegates were present from all parts of the Dominion. The G.C.D. during the other business, asked the question—

" What new stations do we propose occupying ? "

I have had forwarded from the Bradney Quarterly Meeting a recommendation that we appoint a man to the Railway Construction Camps in the centre of the North Island, and I should like the minister from the Bradney Station to give us further information on this matter."

"Hear! Hear!"

"Is the Rev. Hector Nelson in the Conference?"

"Yes."

There were cries of "Platform! Platform!" and Mr. Nelson stepped forward.

"Fathers and Brethren, I want to take you away among the mountains which divide the centre of this island, where well-nigh six hundred men with their wives and families are toiling and straining, and struggling to join line to line by a twin steel track. Most of them work out in the open, where the awe of the everlasting hills is about them, where the sigh of the trees reaches their ears, and where they can see the glories of the heavens. But some are away in the darkness, digging holes in the hills which will enable the train to go through instead of over. These men are without a religious service and Sunday passes like the weekday. Letters have reached me from time to time asking for our Church to deal with the needs of these men. We have no shepherd. We have been promised help, but help has not been forthcoming. We have asked for bread, and have been given a stone. I have personally visited one of these camps and conducted a service. We had a powerful time, and several decided to live a better life. Their parting words to me were, 'Come again, Parson.' And these words have been ringing in my ears ever since. It is up to this Conference to do something practical. Fathers and brethren! Will you do it? There's no failure, except in no longer trying. Give it a trial, with your money and one of your men.

"Before I close, I should like to offer a few suggestions, which may help you in the selection of your man—

1. He should be able to sing.
2. He should have an intense love for his fellow-men.

3. He should be able to make himself at home in the camps and settlers' homes.
4. If possible, he should have a slight knowledge of doctoring and ambulance work.
5. He should be intensely spiritual, and full of sound common-sense.
6. He should be a good organiser.

A few words about his work—

1. He should live at Crowley Camp.
2. He should work the district from Crowley Camp onward.
3. He should immediately put himself in touch with the following settlers" (here Mr. Nelson supplied names of sympathisers in eight different places as well as the name of the Engineer-in-charge, Mr. Glasson.)

He also gave the names of the Assistant-Engineer, Inspector, etc., and advised that the men appointed form the acquaintance of the foremen, gangers, etc. In short, to play the man all round, and the men would respect him. Hospitality would be readily given, and provided by the settlers at the various places interested in the work.

Continuing, Mr. Nelson said—

"He would also need a good horse, saddle and bridle, and saddle-bags for literature. Plenty of literature, and good books for distribution, strong boots and leggings, and an oilskin coat. It would be well to get in chaff for the horse in large quantities, before the bad weather sets in. I think he should take up collections, and enter them in a book, and send a Quarterly Statement to the Executive, with perhaps a monthly report of work done. He should have a local Committee to work with him, of representatives from each place worked. To a loyal energetic man, possessing tact and grit, the suggestions given should be sufficient for an intelligent man to work upon.

"In conclusion, Mr. President and members of this Conference, I would like to point out that, within the next few years, in all probability the railway will tap a great coalfield, and it is thought that a large

town will spring up in the area we suggest you should immediately work. For the present, however, his work would be amongst the settlers and the six hundred men and women in the Railway Construction Camps. There is a magnificent piece of work waiting to be done. The call from Macedonia, 'Come over and help us,' has arrived, and it's up to this Conference to respond, by saying, 'We will undertake this bit of practical work, and thus gladden the hearts of the faithful, who have begun to grow faint through the seeming neglect of the Christian churches, and caused many to say, 'No man careth for my soul.' Let us rise to the occasion," cried Hector Nelson, as he stepped off the platform, "and no longer talk, but act."

Loud cheers followed the speech, and many declared they had never had such a rousing missionary speech at any previous Conference.

The President then said—

"You have heard the full, clear, powerful statement of the case, and its great need from the lips of Mr. Nelson. Does anyone else wish to speak on this question?"

Up rose the Rev. Joseph Challenger, one of the grave, sober fathers and patriarchs of the Conference. He knew something of the needs of these camps and the settlers in this area, and enthusiastically endorsed what Bro. Nelson had said.

"Mr. President!" cried a stickler for order and etiquette, "we have no resolution before the Conference."

"I thought it better to get more information, in discussion, and the mind of the Conference; but perhaps it would be wiser to have a definite resolution."

"All right, Mr. President," said the G.C.D.

"I beg to move that the Railway Construction Camps and the area through which the work is proceeding and likely to proceed, be constituted a 'Saddle-Bag Mission,' and that a suitable agent be sent."

"I beg leave to second this," said Mr. Edgar Thwaites.

Mr. Thwaites was a practical man, and looked at things from a practical standpoint. He always gained the

car of the Conference. He had a great deal of sympathy with all that made for progress, and not much sympathy for men who did not get a move on.

"I have a great deal of sympathy with all that has been said. We have a duty to these people, who are helping to build our nation."

"Where is the money to come from?" shouted Bro. Horner, who was a noted wet blanket on any new enterprise.

"Let us be practical," continued Mr. Thwaites, scarcely heeding the interruption. "So that it does not come to nothing, as many proposals have done, I propose we come down to bed-rock. I am willing to give the scheme promoted by Mr. Nelson a start by a donation of ten pounds."

The Conference began to simmer with subdued emotion. It was clear Mr. Nelson had struck a responsive chord.

Next rose Ex-President Barton, a distinguished layman, of whom it was related that he was a good Conference man, who claimed that he knew of the urgency of the matter as, in his capacity of J.P., he had been over the ground to swear-in a Rifle Corps for the men. In an eloquent speech he congratulated the mover of the resolution, and concluded—

"Put me down for Ten Pounds."

"Put me down for a pound."

"Me for Five."

"Wait a bit. Have you got them all?" asked the Rev. Theophilus Middleton.

"Two tens!" "A pound!" "Five!" "Another Ten!"

A Christ-like enthusiasm laid hold of the Conference. A great desire to help those living in the Railway Construction Camps and bush districts, scattered away from civilization, moved the members. Then Conference began to bubble.

"Another pound!" "Five Pounds more!" "Ten Shillings!"

Subscriptions, varying in amount from ten pounds to a few shillings were made, until one hundred and

twenty pounds were subscribed. It was a spontaneous expression of Christian liberality, which was a credit to the Conference, and was an exhibition of that spirit which should inspire the Conference in its work. At the temporary close of the list of subscriptions the Doxology was sung very heartily. The first year's salary being assured, the resolution was put by the President.

"Those who are agreed, say 'Aye.'"

A tremendous thunder of "Ayes" left no doubt about the mind of the Conference.

"Three cheers for the Saddle-Bag Missionary, and God bless his labours!" shouted an irrepressible brother.

"Wait until you have got him," remarked Mr. Caution.

However, three good cheers resounded through the building in honour of the prospective "Saddle-Bag Missioner." The outburst of Missionary enthusiasm having died down, Mr. Nelson was heartily congratulated on having carried the scheme through the Conference. The matter was then referred to the Stationing Committee to find and appoint the man.

"The members of the Stationing Committee will meet in Number 6 class-room at half-past one," announced the G.C.D., "and as the position is a very important one, every member is particularly requested to be present. The first reading of 'Stations' will take place immediately after the lunch adjournment."

During the lunch-hour one of the principal topics was the Pentecostal outpouring at the morning's session.

"Just think of it! To raise £120 pounds in about ten minutes. Wish we could do that in some of our Circuits."

"Why, it's Pentecost over again!"

"The Church that is enthusiastic stands for progress. Heat means movement. If you want to see growth, you don't go to the Antarctic regions, but to the Tropics."

"I'm glad the old Church has wakened up at last!"

"We must show old Beelzebub a face he has never

seen before," remarked Bro. Strong Jackson. "Plenty of fire left in the old ship," he added.

"Mind she does not get burned, then," said Bro. Gray, in sober tones.

"Amen!" shouted Bro. Jackson, and everybody looked round.

"Only Bro. Jackson letting off Spiritual steam!" ejaculated Bro. Wiseman.

At this, Bro. Jackson in great ecstasy seized Bro. Wiseman and swung him round on the footpath three or four times, to his and everybody's merriment.

"Steady there!" called the Secretary of the Conference, who at that moment appeared on the scene. "You'll be run in by a Wellington 'copper' yet, and we shall have to get up another spontaneous collection to bail you out!"

By this time, Godber's Refreshment Rooms had been reached.

CHAPTER XIV

REV. HECTOR NELSON TO THE RESCUE

" Who is on the Lord's side ?
 Who will serve the King ?
 Who will be His helpers,
 Other lives to bring ?
 Who will leave the world's side ?
 Who will face the foe ?
 Who is on the Lord's side ?
 Who for Him will go ? "

—FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGIL

ONE of the first things Hector Nelson did, after it was settled that he was to take charge of the Construction Camp Mission, was to write to Ralph Messenger acquainting him with the fact. Ralph Messenger replied by the return mail—

" Glad that your efforts have at length succeeded in rousing someone up to consider our need."

Hector Nelson thought over the situation. The Conference had been a good one, the attendance of delegates large, with excellent and fruitful discussion. Men had taken an intelligent interest in the business, and an excellent spirit had prevailed, and he was sure that each delegate had returned home cheered and encouraged. He felt that the Church was increasing in power and moral influence, and thought much more ought to be done. He determined to face the work for the year, thanking God for what had been accomplished, and optimistically believed the best days were yet to come. He had not quite expected to be sent to such a work, as three other places had desired his services for the year. But any disappointment he might have had he spelt with a capital " H " and made it " His " appointment. During the few weeks that must elapse ere he could leave his present circuit, his mind was on his

new work, and he was praying for guidance that right plans might be made. One thing he decided upon, and that was that he should visit every place to be worked, and consult the friends, and find out who were sympathetic.

The time soon passed by, and with it the time for him to commence duties at Crowley Camp.

"Bugle! Bugle!" rang out the voice of the railway guard, as the train drew up in the darkness at the backblock settlement wayside "Flag" station, and the Rev. Hector Nelson, first Superintendent and Missioner of the Saddle-Bag Mission and Railway Construction Camps, collected his belongings and stepped into the darkness of the night.

Shriek! goes the whistle, and the train took its departure, gaining momentum as it left for the regions beyond, and Hector Nelson was left with his luggage.

An unexpected surprise greeted him, for a trap was at the station to meet someone else, and he was offered a ride with them to the farmhouse where he expected to stay the night. Seated in the vehicle behind a good horse, with an equally good driver, the lights of the homestead soon hove in sight. A few minutes more and the new Construction Camps preacher was welcomed, and was soon seated around the table eating a well-prepared supper.

It was a Christian home, and the Bibles were got out and placed around the table, each occupant taking part in alternate reading. "Early to bed" was the motto in this household, for the early morning arrived all too soon for the milkers, who had to be astir at daybreak.

Hector Nelson rose in the morning refreshed, and having obtained a permit to travel by the ballast train at any time, and also by the goods, he made arrangements to go to "The Front." The ballast train only makes so many trips per day, and then not always to the full length of the line in course of construction. Hector Nelson therefore soon found out how far he could travel, and decided to do the journey in stages, and took the early ballast, and travelled part of the

way. He spent his time visiting, and making enquiries as to a suitable building in this camp and settlement for holding the services.

"You might get the old building yonder, formerly used as a billiard-room. The man wants to sell it," said Dick Jones, who usually hung around the station, Micawber-like, waiting for something to turn up; but, when it did, he was not usually there to turn it down.

Hector Nelson made enquiries, and found that the building belonged to one man, and the land to another. He decided to find out the owner of the land, and see if a section could be bought, if needed.

"Who does the land belong to?" he asked of a man who was propping up a post, by leaning against it.

"Mick O'Rafferty, sir, and, by the Saints, he's a Roman!"

Hector found out the direction in which he lived, and went to see him. The place was some distance away.

"Good-day!"

"Does Mr. O'Rafferty live here?"

"Begorra! He does."

"Can he be seen?" asked Mr. Nelson.

"Bedad, he can. Sure enough, and that's myself, Mick O'Rafferty, your speaking to."

"My name's Nelson—Hector Nelson."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Nelson?"

"I'm a Methodist preacher, and have been appointed to work amongst the settlers and Railway Construction Camps."

"At your service, yer reverence. I'm not of your persuasion," said Mick, "but we're all trying for the same place, in the end. You've called to see me. Yes, what can I do for yez?" again asked Mick.

Hector Nelson purposely delayed coming to the point. He wanted to take the measure of his man.

"I believe you own the land upon which the billiard-room stands, Mr. O'Rafferty?"

"Sure, and I do. It's myself bought and paid for it when it was all swamp and standing bush, and before Oi dreamt of the iron horse coming through."

"Would it be possible to secure a section from you upon which to put a building to hold meetings in?"

"Saints preserve us! You mean business."

"Yes, I mean business," said Nelson.

"Well, I'll think it over, and let you know. I dare say I can let you have a bit; but I'll consider the matter, and let you know the price."

"Would you please put it in writing, Mr. O'Rafferty, so that I can bring your answer before the authorities?"

"Right-O!"

Bidding Mr. O'Rafferty good-morning, Hector Nelson was assured that he would do what he could to help him. He next visited every tent, as far as he could in the settlement, and informed everybody that he would be having services regularly. He was delighted to find one of the railway staff and his wife sympathetic, and was told to come at any time. He talked over his plans with them, and got them interested in the work, and persuaded them to take charge of a Sunday School which he proposed starting.

Hector was much pleased and encouraged by his visits in the camp, and discovered many who had a knowledge of Church life, but had "drifted."

Shriek! Shriek! Shriek!

"That's the ballast coming into the station!"

Jumping up from the tea-table, he rushed to the station, and with his belongings was soon seated on the top of a truck-load of huge boulders *en route* to "The Front." At seven o'clock they pulled out of the station further up the line, took on additional trucks, and loaded stores for the camps beyond. The air was fairly keen, and Mr. Nelson felt it pierce through him as they travelled along. On, on they went, passing different camps, and men who had knocked off work for the day. In many cases their wives were standing in the doors of their respective huts as the engine rushed by. Or, in other instances, children sat on the fences and waved their hands or hats, and called to the driver or guard some kindly word of recognition. Frequently a stop was made, and stores and provisions were dropped and claimed by their respective owners.

Remains of old workshops were passed, and stacks of material were waiting to be sent further ahead when needed. Settlers' homes were passed, they were soon within reach of better days. The muddy roads and difficult travelling would soon be a thing of the past. Again rosy children were passed. This time they were swinging on one of the numerous gates that have been erected on the railway. On again. Over swamps that have been drained, by means of the tremendous drains that have been cut. Here the road had deviated, to make way for the railroad track. There a woman was seated at the tent door, alongside the camp-fire, cooking the evening meal. Another stop made. A guard's van was added, and Hector entered it, and was joined by a number of men who were going up to the Front to unload the trucks. Gradually the darkness deepened, and the valleys narrowed in. Hector Nelson was nearing the end of his journey. Soon the brakes were applied and the men commenced to unload the boulders. He had reached the Front, the name given to the end of the construction where the engine cannot further run, and where the thickest population was usually found.

"Can anybody tell me where Inspector McGirr lives?" asked the new arrival.

"Yes! Up there. He may have gone to bed, but, never mind, knock at the door."

Hector found his way with difficulty in the darkness. The clay bank upon which his two-roomed hut stood was by no means easy to climb. However, after coming in contact with a few wire fences, during which he had a few falls, he at last reached the door and knocked.

"Whose there?" a voice demanded from within.

"A stranger. I was told to find out—Mr. McGirr, the Inspector."

"Wait a minute."

A click of a match struck in the darkness, and the glimmer of a candle through the chinks in the wall and the window, was followed by footsteps, and the unbolting of the door soon brought the Inspector and Parson face to face.

"Could you put me up for the night, Mr. McGirr? It's a bit late, but I'd be glad if you could! I've been appointed by the recent Methodist Conference to do mission work in this district, amongst the settlers and men in the Construction Camps, and I've just arrived on the works. My name is Nelson."

"All right. Come inside," said the Inspector. "There is a spare bunk, and a rug. You can pig-in. You'll excuse me retiring to bed early, but we have a shooting match on in Stopford to-morrow, and we have to leave here at five o'clock in the morning. Make yourself at home."

Mr. McGirr turned in again in the other room, and the noises that came through the boards indicated that he was soon fast asleep.

Hector was not long before he likewise turned in. The bunk had no mattress or bed, but simply the hard boards to lie upon. The longer the new preacher lay in it, the harder the boards seemed to become, so that it was well towards morning when sleep took possession of his eyelids. This, with the work going on in the tunnel, and the constant tipping of the trucks as they ran down the incline, with the additional glare of a powerful light used to enable them to turn darkness into light, and night into day, prevented him from going into the land of Nod. Then he began to think, and think. Here he was, placed in this important work. Here was the beginning. What was to be the end? Time alone would tell, but he knew—

"God never sends a man to failure."

The sun was well up when he awakened.

"This will never do," he remarked to himself, "God's messengers must not give the people the idea that they are lazy. It's the early bird that catches the worm."

Inspector McGirr had gone, and he was in charge.

"Time I was out of this," he said.

He had a refreshing wash and looked outside, and found he was at a Camp situated at the base of bush-clad hills, and that the railway construction was proceeding up a narrow gully.

"I must have some breakfast before I do anything else. Nothing like a good foundation for doing a good day's work."

He found out the dining-room, where many of the men had their meals prepared, and obtained a good breakfast. He made himself known, and decided to visit the tents and leave literature ere he went further on. The camp was by no means unpleasantly situated, and made a pleasant picture. The ballast train could get right up to the foot of the hills, and the lines were laid temporarily, and the formation sufficiently advanced to allow goods to be brought right up to the works. The hills were steep and precipitous, as well as bush-clad. As he approached, he found a tremendous lot of work needed to be done ere the line was ready for traffic. A creek had to be diverted, the hills had to be cleared, then two lines of rails were laid to enable cuttings to be excavated. By means of the "Chinaman" they were able to load the trucks underneath. A great deal of blasting was needed, and huge masses of the mountain-side were shivered and slid down ready for the "Chinaman's" mouth to swallow into the trucks. The trucks were quickly filled, and travelled down the incline to the tip, a quarter of a mile distant, automatically. A pointsman shunted them on to the proper line and attended to the tip, and by means of a horse specially trained for the occasion, hauled the empty trucks back again, to be filled by means of the "Chinaman," and so the work proceeded.

At the mouth of this creek, or cutting, were several shops, in which carpenters and blacksmiths were more than fully employed. Hector saw all this, and gained a vast amount of information. Further on was an opening for gravel to be shot through into a lower level for men to make into concrete, while still further on was a ladder down which the men reached the mouth of what was to be a tunnel through the mountain.

CHAPTER XV

TEMPTED IN ALL POINTS

"Men marvel at the poet's song,
Each lyric's soft, enchanting ring,
Nor dream that once, when days were long,
'Twas grief that taught her heart to sing.
They watched the painter's canvas glow
With sunlit waters, dawn's faint blush—
That yield no hint of years ago
When poverty has sped his brush.
Yet I, the shadow Circumstance,
Still wait within my darkened way
And prick men with a testing lance
To prove them more than common clay."

—ELEANOR ROBBINS WILSON.

SUCH was Hector Nelson's introduction to this camp, which he named after the genial Inspector, McGirr's Camp, in recognition of the great help that he had been to him. Having given McGirr's Camp a fairly good visit, he decided to go further ahead. The only way was to climb over the bush-clad mountain saddle, where a rough zigzag track had been cut through the native bush for the workmen. The New Zealand bush is almost beyond description for its beauty. He commenced his climb. Higher and higher he ascended along the winding track until the summit was reached. The journey was livened by the chirping of large quantities of locusts, which were basking in the sunshine. The perspiration was rolling off Mr. Nelson ere he reached the top, and he was glad to rest on a log and survey the situation. The descent was even worse than the ascent; in some places the track had almost slipped away. Down, down he went until he reached the bottom.

The men were at dinner when he reached this camp,

known as Rodney Camp. He made himself known to the man in charge, and told his message, visited the various huts and tents, and worked his way on, hoping to reach Crowley Camp before dark.

On his arrival he sought out Ralph Messenger, who was delighted to see him. They talked over plans of work, and the best means of going about it, and the best place to make his headquarters. As the works progressed it was necessary to keep moving on, so it was decided to visit each place, and the country ahead, and find out who were sympathetic, and thus felt his way. The time soon passed, and he gradually got a knowledge of the various camps throughout the district. He was soon in a position to settle, and made his headquarters at Crowley Camp. He decided to erect a calico tent-house, the material for which was generously supplied by the Public Works Department. He also got a permit to travel up and down the line under construction by the ballast train at any time, also permission for all his literature and goods to be brought to him free of railage. He carried out the plan he had outlined at the Conference *re* a Management Committee, and got a representative from each place to act thereon. Calling these friends together he outlined his work. He stated that he was willing to preach at the different camps in rotation, and was not above taking four services per Sunday if necessary, and every night during the week. A plan of services was made out and printed, and circulated through the various camps. Those who had heard Mr. Nelson preach on his previous visit on the subject of Temptation, asked him to continue the topic in a further address. This he consented to do, and announced that he would speak on "Tempted in all points, Mankind's Great Sympathiser." The news quickly spread, and there was a good attendance.

"Men, the Old Book says, 'We have not an high-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' You can't get away from the teaching of the Old Book. Sympathy is one of the greatest

magnets in the universe. It has done more for the world than anything else. It has been servicable in all grades of society. Amongst all ranks and conditions of mankind it has been appreciated, so at your request I would like us to consider this phase of human nature, so that we may be helped, and benefited along life's pilgrimage, and strengthened to fight every form of temptation. Men, Jesus Christ was the Great Sympathiser. Let us look at Him as such. Under the same blue heavens two men go on their way, each moving towards the Temple. One a Pharisee, who is going to pray—one for whom the people make way, greeting him with homage, a man marked off from others by dress, by look, by manner. By all associations and surroundings of his life he had been kept from the rougher winds that beat on common people. The other a publican. None were more utterly loathed than these wretched tax-gatherers. A publican was the lowest epithet, the foulest suggestion to hurl at your enemy. They were traitors who actually collected the hated taxes which Roman authority had dared to lay upon the people of God. Both went into the Temple. Follow me closely and you will notice that Christ does not despise the efforts of the poor publican. He encourages him. Christ's sympathy is very broad, and as we study His life from the 'manger to the Cross' we find it to be one of intense sympathy. Christ bridged the gulf of social distinction. See that leper there, with his horrid, hideous, loathsome disease. He is shunned by all—a social outcast. No friend knew him. He had no neighbour. His wife was a stranger, his children turned from him. No kindly greeting ever fell upon his ear; no helpful hand was ever reached to him. The law drove him out as accursed. 'Begone!' cried the law, 'we have no room for such a one as thou art. There is no place for thee. We can give thee no word of hope; we have no power of help. Begone.' But down from the mount came One Whose great love could not be turned aside. With infinite pity He bent over the prostrate leper, His hand was laid upon him, and that touch restored him to the human brotherhood and

family. It was like heaven to him—that touch of tenderness, that tone of sympathy. Not to be shunned, not to be cursed, not to be turned from with horror and disgust—to think that so great a blessing lay in that. This is what Jesus Christ brings to the lowest. Let us note well this thought, that Christianity is just Christ-likeness: or it is nothing, and less than nothing. Every Christian is thus far a Christ—that in him God dwells in the midst of men, and through him God pours forth His love. Oh, for this true Christianity! not in sermons only, but right through the whole life, in every breath and heart-beat of it. Not on Sunday only, and in church, but on Monday and Tuesday, and throughout the whole of the week, and in all the commonest ways of life, and the streets of the city, and in the railway construction camps. Thus and only thus can the deep gulf that sever men be bridged—by men and women whose religion is not a respectable orthodoxy, not a selfish salvation, but a living Christ-likeness of pity and love.

“Look at the home at Bethany; here sympathy is displayed. Look at the sheep on the mountains; the Christ goes after it. Look at the condition of the widow of Nain and her only son. Look at the woman who had spent all in doctors, and their medicine; Christ cures her after twelve years of suffering. Look at the Samaritan woman who had fallen, who was an outcast of society. Christ shows His sympathy, and she is won into the paths of rectitude. Men in these Construction Camps, we need this spirit. To-day we too often see the reverse. If a man or woman has fallen, Society says ‘Kick them further down.’ Men, that’s not Christianity. If a man or woman has made a mistake, let’s show them tenderest sympathy, and try and win them again. Those who speak and act in love enlarge their powers for sacred service, and kindle brighter and brighter light. The taper becomes a lamp, and the lamp becomes a star, which is hope and guidance to multitudes. It is this sympathy that is going to make this world brighter and better. How is it to be obtained? By passing under similar troubles and temptations.

Afflictions have been of inestimable service. What self-knowledge, what experience, what a power of sympathy they have produced !

" An untried man is like an uneducated man. Of all schools, the school of affliction is that which teaches most effectually. A man who is a stranger to religion cannot condemn it, because he does not understand it. Every man and woman must taste the bitter as well as the sweet before he can preach or prophesy of, or feed others with, spiritual food, or assist them to overcome temptation. To do this we must copy Christ. He sympathises with us in our innocent infirmities, wants, weaknesses, miseries, and dangers.

" Men, can't you trust Him ? He takes notice of you. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without His knowledge. His sympathy is so full. When the malefactor began to pray, the centurion and the soldiers, the priests and the scribes, the passers-by, and multitudes of people—all have vanished ; He has all the room. The world needs such a One to-day, some One to tell its troubles to. The greatest blessing you could give to tens of thousands of men and women in the world is this—some One to whom they could fully and freely open their hearts. Young people with aspirations after goodness, when goodness is sneered at, need sympathy. Wearied souls beset with doubts and bewildered with the triumphs of evil need sympathy. Men and women bound down by the past long to have sympathy, and men and women harassed and burdened by common difficulties, money matters, and business troubles, and common weekday perplexities.

" The hardest thing, the heaviest burden of care, is to be uncared for. The hardest thing to endure is the loneliness of one's grief. Jesus Christ supplies this need. Boys, the Best Friend to have is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the succourer of the tempted. He was in all points tempted like as we are. This world is full of snares and pitfalls. Temptations on the right ; temptations on the left. This being so, we need a helper, a guide. Such a one is Jesus Christ. He hath

suffered, being tempted ; He is able to succour them that are tempted. He is able to succour and help you at all times, wherever you may be tempted. Men, listen ! Isn't it grand ? Tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin. He is therefore the sinless conqueror. He knows our weaknesses. He knows our difficulties, having passed through them Himself. But He says, ' Men, be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.' As He overcame, so may we. God help us."

The dining-room of the Calico Boarding House was crowded. A great impression had been made. Men and women stayed behind to be prayed for.

Hector Nelson that night struck oil, and many were added to the Church of the Living God.

CHAPTER XVI

BUTCHER TOMPKINS IS AN IMPORTANT MAN

"Do you know the world is dying
For a little bit of love?
Everywhere we hear their sighing
For a little bit of love.
For the love that rights a wrong,
Fills the heart with hope and song,
They have waited, oh, so long,
For a little bit of love."

—E. O. EXCELL.

"Co-ee! Butcher!"

Jack Tompkins had arrived, and those in the camp who had the good fortune to be the possessor of a wife had no care about the meat supply, for, plate in hand, she went down to his cart, or rather wagon, drawn by two and sometimes three or even four mud-bespattered horses. But those who had tarried in matrimonial matters, and who had not the joy of possessing the greatest gift a man can receive, a good wife, had a box erected, and in it was placed a note, stating how many pounds of sausages, steak, mutton, pork, or beef they needed. Butcher Tompkins was a welcome visitor, for he brought in many instances the only news from the outer world. At other times he carried the mail, newspapers, and even the bread, and sometimes the stores. His was an unenviable position, or job, for he had to travel at all hours and under all conditions of weather. Summer and winter, hail or snow, wind or rain, he had to be on the road, and away from his home at a very early hour, especially so when the roads were bad. On these dark, cold, wintry mornings he had to yoke up by means of lantern light. This necessitated loading up overnight, so that he could meet the needs of the Construction Camps.

Butcher Tompkins was a good, genial character,

and never felt anything to be a trouble, as he went about amongst the camp men; hence, he had any quantity of messages to fulfil. But one thing he refused to do, and that was to cart in bottles of liquor.

"Got any of Captain Cook's descendants' remains in your wagon?" cried Bob Claridge, the blustering navy, as he came up for his supply of meat.

"Or any bags of mysteries, otherwise sausages?"

Just then Jim Flint came along.

"Perhaps he has some more old cow to mate the last lot, which was so tough that I used it instead of leather."

"Good-day, Mr. Tompkins. Are you still cutting beef-steak from behind the horns? If so, I will take a couple of pounds," said Ned Strawbridge.

The camps were great on meat. It was their principal diet, and the men who worked hard consumed large quantities.

Mr. Jack Tompkins enjoyed all their little jokes. Sometimes he got one home on to them. Generally, everything passed off pleasantly until all were served. He usually called a halt at Weedon's Camp, fed his horses, and had a snack and a cup of tea himself, served the folks, and went on his way rejoicing, cutting and serving until his meat was nearly all delivered. Jack Tompkins was a Christian man, and often put in a word for his Master as he went about his duty. The muddy roads, with the weight of meat, made the journeys very trying, especially as camps kept moving further away. Still he was cheered with the thought that he might be doing some good, and he remembered that—

"Nothing great is lightly won,
Nothing won is lost;
Every good deed nobly done
Will repay the cost."

These words, with the following couplet, which he often quoted, encouraged him again and again—

"Whate'er is done, and is forgot,
Work done for God, it dieth not."

He was always pleased when Sunday came round, for he took charge of the little Sunday School in the settlement, acted as church steward, and, being fond of music, sometimes consented to sing a solo at the evening service. His home was always thrown open to the preachers, and many a kindly word of cheer and generous action was down to their credit. His home was always bright and cheerful. They had passed through the shadows of bereavement, and could sympathise with those in a similar condition. They knew what disappointment meant, but through it all Jack kept the flag a-flying for the cause of righteousness. His heart was big and tender. Twice a week he visited the camps.

Ralph Messenger and he were bosom friends, and had something to do with Hector Nelson responding to the "Call from Macedonia." He naturally took a great deal of pride in the development of the Construction Camp Mission, and distributed handbills or anything announcing services connected therewith, or posted up a few placards or posters on the trunk of some of the bush trees alongside the road which he passed. He had many narrow escapes from perishing in the mud, as meat, horses, vehicle, and butcher frequently disappeared in the slush and mud along the service road. He often acted the good Samaritan, and helped others out of the bogs. One morning, as he journeyed, he found the lady school-teacher almost enveloped, and gallantly got her out. His cheery voice always put heart into anyone in trouble. He was as good as a newspaper. Anybody wanting to know the time? It was Butcher Tompkins supplied it. What's the news? Jack Tompkins had the latest. He was well posted in current events.

Food was fairly expensive (apart from meat) in these camps. Two hundred per cent. more. Flour often £1 to 25/- per cwt., while onions had been supplied at threepence per pound. The bad roads often accounted for this, but often lack of competition gave the men Hobson's choice—take them at the price, or starve. They had the matter, however, largely in their own

hands, for if they had liked to combine they could have run a co-operative store amongst themselves. The living conditions in the Construction Camps were by no means bad—in fact, the situation of the tent, and arrangement both outside and inside, depended very largely upon the taste of the occupier. Some of them were very comfortable indeed, and were divided into two or three apartments, according to the size and taste of the families concerned. In some were a dining-room, sitting-room, and bedroom. Some of the married people had a piano, as well as the other ornaments and pictures which are to be met with in settled and permanent homes. Some of the single men's calico houses or tents were pictures of neatness, Ralph Messenger's amongst them. If we took a peep into his tent we should find well-arranged and well-filled book-shelves, and on them the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" in volumes, and the set of the "International School of Correspondence," besides works of the various poets and books of a miscellaneous character. Oilcloth covered the wooden floor. On the top of which were a few skin, woolly mats placed in different parts of the room. There was a small table, a chest of drawers, and a hanging lamp. A "Perfection" oil-heater warmed the room when needed. One could not wish for pleasanter quarters for the class of work engaged in. On the other hand, as in every other walk of life, one found cheerlessness and want of comfort—largely the result of the owner or occupier of the dwelling.

At McDonald's Camp a village was already being formed. It possessed a boot-shop, the proprietor being an ex-policeman; there was also a boarding house and tea-rooms, and stables were also being erected. These buildings, however, were of a very primitive nature, composed of a few sheets of galvanised iron, and had earth floors. At other places along the line there were tea-houses, and these were a great boon to the unmarried men, who got their meals cooked for sixteen shillings per week, the department's staff collecting the bills on behalf of the proprietors of the

establishment. The bill of fare was as follows, for dinner—soup, meat, three kinds of vegetables, and a fruit pie, with two cups of tea. A single meal of the above cost one shilling. In fine weather the conditions were ideal. In wet, rainy, or stormy weather the position was not so pleasant ; but much depended upon the way one looked at it. Some people dosed down (lived anywhere), but it was largely their own fault. The living amongst those who provided for themselves consisted chiefly in some camps (where Butcher Tompkins could not get) of " tin dog " (meat) or " tin cat " (fish), and usually, when a camp was lifted, tins could be seen by the cartload.

One day a notice was received in camp stating that an organiser belonging to a number of men who had formed themselves into a Railway Construction Workers Union was to visit the camps along the line, and address meetings and consider proposals, so that they could lay their needs before the Government. Mr. Dawkins, the organiser, duly arrived, and stated what he had found in other parts of the Dominion. As a result of his visit, many of the men joined, and decided to ask, amongst other things, for ten shillings as the minimum wage per day, timber for the tents, chimneys for the tents, proper sanitary conveniences, and for a quarter of an hour for " smokoegoh," etc. In cases where the men had to walk more than a mile to work, they decided to ask for travelling allowance, and for a weekly wage for drivers who have to attend to their horses at all times, but who get only paid for the time actually worked in the cuttings, also to be paid for shifting their camps.

" You can get the timber now for the tents ; all you have to do is to apply for it in writing," said one.

" Yes, but we require to get it without a written application," replied the organiser.

" Then you would break up the system and order, and the business way of carrying on the affairs of this country," replied Tom Galloway, who was in charge of the store department.

" No," replied Mr. Dawkins. " But some of the men

are not too well educated, and this prevents some from making application in writing."

"The men have not much to complain of in that respect," replied Tom.

It is surprising what a number of grievances can be found when an agitator comes along—in fact it does not take long to see that some men would just as soon lie down alongside their work, as to do it. One of the advantages of the Co-operative system was that a man (it was alleged) got paid for what he did, and this gave every man a chance of earning at any rate a living, and more if he worked harder. There is said to be a Scriptural injunction, "if any man will not work, neither shall he eat." Of course, a great deal depends upon the character of those who form the gang to do the piece of work. Some men "work." Some men—well, neither play, nor work, but kill time, and their greatest enemy is their watch. A resolution of importance, however, was passed unanimously by those present in favour of the Co-operative system, in preference to one of small contracts let among the men, some of whom thereby become the employers of their fellow-men.

"Why should not a man become an employer if he chuses, and has brains and grit enough to undertake such a position?" asked Ralph Messenger.

"It's not Socialism," replied Mr. Dawkins, "and Socialism is what we are after."

"Would you give me a minute to show you that the optional system is right?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go ahead, Messenger!" shouted a chorus of voices.

"When we get an idea, we are tempted to ride it to death," said Ralph. "We have now got the idea of Socialism. I am not speaking politically; I am simply thinking of the idea we have got into our heads that we must do everything for somebody else. Of course, that is all right. But, remember, our Lord simply told us to love our neighbour as ourselves. I don't think He told us to love our neighbour more than ourselves, I

don't think He told us not to love ourselves. Let us be sane about these matters. You know a man cannot get on in business in the city if he is always trying to get people to buy from the shop on the other side of the street. It is not un-Christian to try and get them into his own. Self-denial does not mean self-neglect. It is narrow and ignorant to say it is wrong to appeal to a man to study his own interests in the things of the spirit. The first appeal the Gospel makes to a man is to protect his own soul. It is up to every man in this camp to better himself if he can," continued Ralph, "and the man who is habitually suspicious of others is himself untrustworthy; and he who judges another is often guilty of those very faults he condemns. True socialism is—'As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye unto them likewise.' For instance, if Mr. Dawkins had a better position offered to him he would naturally take it, and every man who is worth his salt would do the same. There is plenty of room on the top. Aim high; but don't strike at the root of manly self-reliance, of which every true Britisher is proud."

Ringling cheers greeted Ralph as he resumed his seat.

Mr. Dawkins was clearly dismayed. He had not reckoned on such an opponent in his organisation campaign. Instead of having it all his own way, a resolution providing for the optional system plan of construction was carried by a substantial majority.

CHAPTER XVII

THE "SLY-GROGGER" APPEARS

"The successful man, whether in business or politics, who has risen by conscienceless swindling of his neighbours, by deceit and chicanery, by unscrupulous boldness and unscrupulous cunning, stands towards society as a dangerous wild beast."

—THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

AFTER a time another section of line was opened for traffic, and more men were put on. There were now many hundreds of men living under canvas; some of them had their wives, as already stated, with them. All classes were to be met with, but Ralph Messenger still kept himself apart. As the camps increased, so did the character of some of the arrivals. A difference was noticed in the men; some of them were frequently intoxicated or "shickered," as it was termed on the works. It was rumoured that some of the most despicable villains on God's earth had made their way to the camps, and that "grog" could be bought on the sly. From the information that leaked out, it appeared that there were "shebeens" all along the line. At any rate, those men who wanted liquor had no difficulty in obtaining it, so long as their money lasted.

"When liquor gets into a man, it's the liquor that talks." Mr. Thirsty could no longer contain his knowledge, and stated that the figure demanded for a bottle of whisky was anything from 12/- to 15/-, and even at this price those who sold the stuff were not satisfied, but, if opportunity were afforded, would further rob the men who dealt with them. Listen while Mr. Thirsty and his companion tell their experiences of a night or two before.

They purchased a bottle of whisky, the cork of which had previously been drawn for the convenience of whosoever might purchase it. They commenced to

drink from the bottle on their way to the camp, and not being satisfied or pleased with the taste of their whisky, struck matches and investigated. Certainly they had a whisky bottle, but a considerable portion of the original contents had been removed, and the bottle again filled up with swamp-water, for floating around was a very respectable quantity of moss. This was not an isolated case of the way in which the men were robbed by those from whom they made their purchases of grog.

Other instances were revealed. The culprits on two occasions were discovered to be men working on the line, and they were promptly dismissed. They were a strange mixture, the men on these railway works. The University man was there, whose conversation gives him a certain distinction. He worked with the pick and shovel, because his liking for liquor had made him unfit to take a position of responsibility. The ill-educated devil-may-care was there, who bursts each fortnight's pay in a wild carousal. It was principally these that the "Sly-Grogger" got hold of.

One day, Hector Nelson was riding along inviting the men to a service he was going to hold that night. He was unknown to the gang of navvies, who were making a road deviation. As he was passing, one of them stepped out from the rest and said—

"I say, boss. Have you got a bottle of whisky on you? Give you a 'tenner' for it."

"I'll give you a pound," said another.

"No, men, I don't deal in such stuff," declared Hector. "You're better without it."

"Oh! he's a blooming wowser," said the leader, evidently disappointed.

"Men, I'm having a meeting to-night in the dining-room in Larry's Camp. Come along, and we will see who is the 'wowser.' Now, chaps, toe the line," said Hector.

"All right, Bishop; we'll be there, won't we, boys?"

"Aye, aye, Bishop."

"He's got us this time."

Hector had turned the tables on them completely,

and they felt they could not escape the situation. Sure enough, they all came to the meeting in full force, and the dining-room was more than comfortably filled. After singing and prayer, Mr. Nelson said—

"I have a very important subject for to-night. As I was travelling to-day in a certain gang, because I did not happen to carry a bottle of whisky, and stated who I was, and what I was after, I was called a 'wowser.' I am going to try and answer, 'What is a wowser?'"

The word, it is understood, was derived from a Chinese term, meaning a man of probity and character; but he had also seen it stated that the word was a corruption of "rouser." However, neither definition worried him, because it was the sneer now implied that he proposed to deal with. According to opponents, the "wowser" was the most objectionable person in the world; he should be driven out of public life. When arguments failed, where right had triumphed, where wrong was exposed, trampled on and slain, their opponents shouted "Wowser!" A man who believed in noble living, and avoided impurity, was called a "wowser." Now, what is wowserism? Apparently, services to raise human life, to fight against the drink traffic, and all its influences, was wowserism; the abolition of bookmaking was wowserism; the diminishing of racing permits was wowserism; the proposed abolition of the totalisator was wowserism; to support any reform was wowserism; and all such attempts to reform were to be withstood, and selfishness and greed were to be unhampered. Anyone who attempted to guide national life into holy and pure channels must get off the earth. The use of the term was an attempt to intimidate the sensitive and stop the rising tide of conscientiousness that proved life was a grand and a noble thing, and that salvation is supreme; that it was better to be generous than selfish; better to be brave than a coward. The great cry of the anti-wowser was Liberty. He played the game of "go as you please." The liberty the anti-wowser sought was to gamble the homes from suffering women, to take the bread from the little children; to bind manhood and woman-

hood with strong drink ; to increase the mental defectives in the community ; to fill the police cells ; to discredit the wowzers ; to defile life, to turn hell loose ; to unchain the devil, and stop the mouth of God. The anti-wowser cared nothing for brotherhood, and was unaffected by the woes, sorrows, and calamities that followed his pleasures and interests. If the anti-wowser prayed at all, it was, " God save me from the other fellow."

Mr. Nelson drew their attention to the fact that the " wowzers " had been called Puritans, and he reminded them that, in the United States of America, to be a descendant of a Pilgrim Father who went over in the *Mayflower* was a great distinction. There are two sides to every question, the right and the wrong, and, as sure as darkness followed the daylight, no question was or could be properly settled until it was settled right. You will see that there is more in being called " wowser " than those who use the term ever think or dream of. Many good names have been given in derision, so let no one be discouraged by being called a " wowser."

" Would any of you fellows like to ask any question ? " asked Mr. Nelson.

" By golly ! he's beaten us hollow this time. He's a cute bloke, is the Bishop," said the man who had asked Hector in the afternoon if he had a bottle of whisky.

Hector's first visit to Larry's Camp was not forgotten for many a long day. As the camps increased, stores and other shops were erected in either galvanised iron or calico. One in particular attracted passers-by. It bore the sign " Soft-drinks sold here." One day Mr. Nelson called, and was interested to find, in splendid array, a tremendous quantity of bottles all labelled " Lemonade, Ginger Ale, Lemon Squash, Soda, Hop's Ale, Raspberryade, Scotch Punch, Mahana punch, Ginger Beer, Hopbeer," etc. The shelves were full.

" Doing a good business ? "

" Oh, can't complain," replied the proprietor.

" You ought to be able to stop the infernal ' Sly-

grog' seller," said Hector, " and if you can do this I wish you well."

" Seen anything of Bill Sykes about this morning?" asked Inspector McGirr to the men who were ready to commence work.

" No. He's not turned out yet."

As Mr. McGirr wanted to see him rather particularly he went over to his camp.

" Are you in, Bill?"

No reply.

" Are you well, Bill?"

No answer again.

Thinking something unusual must be the matter, Mr. McGirr pulled aside the fly of the tent door, and looked in and found poor Bill was dead. The newspaper report closed Bill Sykes' history in the following words—

A young man named William Sykes was found dead in his tent on the railway works at McGirr's Camp on Monday morning. An inquest was held before Mr. Corncroft, the acting Coroner. Dr. Morris made a post-mortem examination, and found the young fellow had died from the effects of alcoholic poisoning. There is no doubt drink was purchased from " Sly-grog " sellers, and it is a great pity that the police could not follow it up and prosecute the person who sold it.

Many men were splendid fellows, and would have been all right but for the " Sly-grog " seller. They were away from the drink, and did not want it; but when they got a " sniff " of it, it made them like tigers. The death of Bill Sykes caused a great deal of talk, and indignation amongst the men, and the " Sly-grog " seller had some hard things said about him. But he had no conscience. He was one of the vilest criminals outside the four walls of a gaol, and hanging was too good a punishment for him. He carried on his nefarious trade at the point of and by means of the revolver, and even did not stoop to commit murder if driven to bay. However, if plenty of hard work was put in, with a magistrate who would help, and back you up, it could be done.

" It's all nonsense," said Constable Grainger, " to

say it can't be stamped out. If all will combine it can be done."

Poor Bill Sykes was found to have no one belonging to him in the Dominion. Hector Nelson therefore took all the arrangements in hand. Letters in his box showed that he had not been out from home long, and had left a mother living behind, and the photo of a young lady inscribed, "To dear Bill, with fondest love, from your intended and loving sweetheart May," showed that his death would break somebody's heart.

Hector Nelson could read no further. He had discovered the address of Bill's mother, and her last letter, and the other one, both of whom were looking forward to the time when Bill could save up sufficient to send for them to come to him, and now their cherished plans were smashed to the ground. Their Bill was dead—slain by the "Sly-grogger." Horrible! He was to be buried at Crowley Camp, as there was a cemetery close by. His mates carried him over the hill. It was a pathetic scene. A young man, in a far-off country, "Somebody's boy," slain by the villainy of the "Sly-grogger," and now put under the sod.

"'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes,' " read Hector, or, as he was familiarly styled, the Bishop, throughout the camps. "Men! Here is a warning to each of you, and, if you will only take it, Bill Sykes will not have been slain in vain. Hunt out the 'Sly-grog' seller. He's no good to you or the country. In fact, you can't tell me of one good thing the liquor traffic of which he is the agent stands for. Think of the value of one life. Financially, every life is estimated to be worth from three to four hundred pounds each, but some lives cannot be valued in hard cash, for the influence they exercise cannot be tabulated. Their value to the Dominion is untold."

The sun was sinking in the western sky ere the service concluded, and the men filed away from the open grave, to return to their respective camps. The next morning Hector Nelson, by request of the Engineer, visited Bill's tent once more. It was a sad visit. He carefully gathered his belongings together, and packed those

that were of value in his box. There were the letters and the little tokens of love from home and mother, and from the other one who had become even closer than mother—the one who had promised to share Bill Sykes' name and future. Two different locks of hair in the locket on his watch-chain brought tears to his eyes. He would never forget the sentences in the last letter—

"MY DEAREST BILL,

I am looking forward to coming across the water to you. Work hard, keep straight, and we shall soon be united. We are almost counting the time. Every night and morning I pray for you, Bill. I trust you read the little Bible I put into your hand when we parted; and pray for me, too, Bill.

What a grand meeting we shall have! and what a long life we hope to spend together!

Yours till death us do part,

MAY."

He could read no more; things were too sacred. He finished his packing, and despatched the box to the English address. His next work was the worst of all. He had to write and break the news of Bill's death. How could he tell them how it happened? Could he give them such a cruel blow? He prayed for guidance, and he decided to briefly state that Bill had been found in his tent, having died in his sleep on such a date, and that it had been his duty as minister in charge of the Camps to attend to matters, and that Bill was buried in Crowley Camp Cemetery. He was returning his belongings, of value to them, and committed them to the Eternal Father's care.

Bill Sykes' sudden death made an impression in McGirr's Camp, and for several weeks the effect was noticed.

CHAPTER XVIII

PROMOTION

"Seize, then, the minutes as they pass ;
The woof of life is thought !
Warm up the colours ! let them glow
With fire of fancy fraught.
Live to some purpose ; make thy life
A gift of use to thee ;
A joy, a good, a golden hope,
A heavenly argosy."

THE effect, however, on some unfortunately soon wore off, and it was reported that some deluded dupes had even paid £1 per bottle for the "Sly-grogger's" concoctions, while some of them who were extremely thirsty went into town by the train from the opened length on Saturday night. Many got "tanked" (full up with drink), and some diabolical scenes were witnessed in the train on its return journey. The lock-up in Stopford frequently had more than it could hold. It was reported that a special sitting of the Justices had to be held on the Sunday morning to deal with these cases—there were so many of a mushroom growth when Thirsty & Co. visited the place. Of course, no particular hotel served them. They, like Topsy, "must have growed," and become drunk. Further evidence of such visits was to be seen alongside the railway line, in the tremendous number of "Dead Marines" (empty beer bottles). It was not long before another tragedy occurred.

Pat Murphy's case was pathetic. He was the usual type of Irish navvy, alone in the world, living in his tent near to his work, and the end was drawing near. The ebb tide was carrying Pat away on its bosom. He had lived hard, and was dying alone. A good woman, the wife of a man working on the same section, moved

about the dying man, doing such little things as she could.

"I believe," said old Johnny the Greek, "that he is a good Catholic, same as me. So when he die, I couldn't read my Book of Prayer, but I remember a prayer I learnt long ago ; so me and the old woman kneel down and I say de prayer. Den I saw old Pat pass out."

Next day the body was taken away by the police, and a few of Murphy's fellow-workers came along to see him out of the camp. That was the end of poor Pat. These sights and doings grieved Ralph Messenger, but he was powerless to prevent them. If the time ever came that he could, he would, he resolved.

Mr. Glasson, the Engineer, had kept his eye on Ralph Messenger, and watched the thorough manner with which he went about his work, knowing that he was studying hard in his spare time to enable him to rise to a higher position in life. For a long time he had been waiting for an opening, and determined to offer him a rise when such was available. The opportunity came at last, and one day he asked Ralph if he would like to be put on another class of work ; if so, he had a vacancy which he thought might suit him well. He wanted an Inspector over a length or section under construction, and this would give him a practical knowledge, and possibly be a stepping-stone to something else. Ralph thanked Mr. Glasson for his kindness, and stated he would be pleased to accept the position, and would do his level best to give satisfaction. The Engineer announced that Mr. Ralph Messenger would take charge of the new length, and the men would recognise that he was placed over them, and were to take their orders for this length from him.

Ralph called the men together who were likely to be under his charge, and said—

"Men, I am not given to speech-making, but I want to say this. I want you to understand me. So much work needs to be done, and the more you do the better for yourselves. I want you to look upon me as your true friend. I shall expect my men to be the best on the line. One word, and I have done. I want you to

help me to keep our length free from the ravages of the "Sly-grog" seller. Will you help me to do it? I shall try and take an interest in your welfare, and trust we shall have many happy and profitable hours together."

Ralph Messenger thus became Inspector of Rodney Camp. There was a great deal of filling and deviating to be done on this length. Huge cuttings had to be made, concrete culverts to be put in, and new road-work undertaken; bush had to be cleared and destroyed ere the country was ready for the formation, upon which to place the temporary rails. There was a great crowd of men employed on this length, and as the line touched the main road again at this section, it made a busy camp. Ralph was true to his promise, and called a meeting of all who were interested in the formation of a Mutual Improvement or Debating Society to attend at Black's Dining Room. He explained the object, and the benefits to be received from such a society. After discussion it was decided to form such, and Rodney Camp Mutual Improvement and Debating Society came into existence.

Ralph stated it would be necessary to draw up some rules to guide them, and suggested that the rules be adopted as follows—

1. Each meeting shall have the power to elect its own Chairman.
2. The hour of starting will be half-past seven o'clock.
3. The first business to select subject and speakers for the next meeting.
4. As far as possible, the meeting shall be held weekly.
5. The opening speakers will have not more than five minutes allowed for each address.
6. It shall be left to the discretion of the Chairman to allow the leaders to speak again during the debate, until the proper time arrives for their closing remarks.
7. No Chairman shall take sides, but shall put together the points raised by both sides at the close of the debate, before the vote be taken.
8. The Chairman shall be time-keeper, but should he

- overlap the time, any member has the right to call him to order, and he shall be compelled to put the vote without further comment.
9. The Chairman or any member, deeming another has departed from the point at issue, shall have power while the other is speaking to rise to a point of order, and ask the speaker to deal entirely with the matter on hand.
 10. Should a difference of opinion be expressed as to whether the speaker so called to order was away from the point, the Chairman shall take a vote of the meeting.
 11. After the two leaders have made their final speech, on no account will any member be allowed to speak, except in explanation, and the Chairman shall sum up the points raised and proceed to put the motion, for or against.
 12. At 9 o'clock the Chairman shall ask the respective leaders to finally speak, each being allowed three minutes, and the Chairman must put the vote before nine-fifteen, allowing him four minutes to sum up.

The rules were adopted.

"Who shall be our President?"

"Mr. Messenger!" responded a chorus of voices.

"Who shall be our Secretary?"

"Mr. George Cunningham."

One of the workmen was elected.

The subject chosen for the opening night was the "Art of Public Speaking," and the President was put down for the opening. Great interest was manifest and attached to the opening meeting. The week passed by very quickly, and the auspicious night arrived. A fine crowd of men came along, and many new members joined. Mr. Jack Thomas, who could always hold up his own end of the stick, was elected Chairman for the meeting, and in due time called upon Mr. Messenger to introduce the subject, "The Art of Public Speaking."

"Language," said Mr. Messenger, "is as the lungs of a nation, and not only the religious, social, political, organs through which advice, ideas, opinions are

breathed, but also hygienic lungs, for talking is one of the best modes of exercise possible to the human body. Clergymen, barristers, and orators are a long-lived race. No position is so elevated, and no position should be more elevating, than that of a fine orator. To die for your country is grand, but to live and speak for your country is grander and more difficult. For ordinary and even extraordinary use, the English language comprises about ten thousand words. Three thousand words is the average number needed for a lifetime, while five thousand words may be regarded as ample for the needs of everyday conversation. Children express their thoughts by means of only two or three hundred. The two ignorant classes, children and ordinary workmen, only use from two to four hundred. Preachers and politicians, though they use as many thousands, seem often not to have enough, for they frequently have to repeat their words over and over again. The successful speaker knows how to use the aspirate, the letter "H," in different words," said Ralph. "Not like one of the men in a certain place not a hundred miles away, who was asked by a visitor about the birth of a child.

'Is it a boy?'

'No, sir.'

'Is it a girl?'

'No, sir.'

'Then what on earth is it?'

'A hare, sir, and all the family are well pleased with it.'"

The Debating Society progressed famously, and Ralph was asked to start a Branch of the St. John's Ambulance, and instructed the men in practical work; This was highly appreciated by the men, and became increasingly useful to them in connection with their work. Ralph's other nights were fully taken up with his International School of Correspondence work. On Sunday he still went to Crowley Camp, and took charge of the little Mission Sunday School. They had some splendid times together. Miss Barlow was true to her duties, and the children increased to such an extent

that the room became almost too small for them. A day-school was badly needed. They sent in a request to the Board of Education, but the reply came—"Impossible to erect a permanent school, on account of the shifting population, but we could supply a teacher, if a suitable building could be obtained." Several put their heads together, and interviewed the Engineer, with the result that sufficient timber for a frame and canvas to cover it was allowed, and in a short time Crowley Camp could boast of a Public School. This became very useful, not only for the purpose for which it was erected, but for a meeting-place for the camp, and for Sunday School and Religious Services. Several of the men of the Ambulance Club were anxious to obtain certificates for their work. So Ralph arranged for a doctor to come out and put them through an examination.

He put six questions to them—

1. What are the various kinds of fractures of bones?
Describe the difference in symptoms between fractures and dislocations.
2. Classify the different forms of hemorrhage, and state how you would treat them.
3. Give the symptoms and treatment of fainting.
4. Describe the symptoms and treatment of opium poisoning.
5. Describe the preparations necessary for receiving a sick or injured person into a house.
6. Describe the heart, and give a brief account of the circulation of the blood.

The answers were to be given in writing, and the papers were to bear a distinguishing mark, but no name. To obtain a pass it was necessary to get four questions right out of the six. When the exam. was completed, it was found that, out of the dozen who sat, ten had passes, and in due time they received their diplomas.

Ralph Messenger was gratified, and felt that his labour had not been in vain. He worked harder than ever in the evenings, and succeeded in getting through

another course of his own examination with credit. But what did it matter? Who would care amongst his friends whether he succeeded or not? There were times when he could not forget his early days, and how his hopes had been shattered, by some one, whom he could not tell. He would give a good deal to have the mystery unravelled, and yet what did it matter? Who would care? He was in a new country, living a new life, and possibly he was forgotten by now in the Homeland. He had read somewhere, "It is not wise to dwell on the past, except as an incentive for the future." Such thoughts only came to him when, like Elijah, he got under the juniper tree. Hector Nelson had told him that the sense of loss may, like the hope of gain, sting and spur us into action. The lost possessions of England may have injured our National pride, but they may have, in the long run, been a blessing in disguise, and prepared us to be on the alert against greater disaster.

When we lost our last fragment of French territory it left such a mark on the life of those who were then responsible for the destiny of England that she has profited by it through the succeeding ages. Still he wondered. Hector Nelson had declared that nothing happened by chance, and that everything was overruled. He was to trust, and that some time he would understand. In the meantime he must wait. He was to "Count his blessings." Yes, but—

That word meant a tremendous lot to Ralph.

CHAPTER XIX

CALICO TOWN PROGRESSES

" Better than gold is a peaceful home,
Where all the fireside character come,
The shrine of love, the heaven of life,
Hallowed by mother, or sister, or wife ;
However humble the home may be,
Or tried with sorrow by Heaven's decree :
The blessings that never were bought or sold
And centre there are better than gold."

MORE men kept pouring on to the works from all parts of the Dominion. An order had gone from the electors of the country to Parliament demanding that this line should be pushed on with greater speed. The result was soon evident. Calico tents and huts and small calico towns sprang up and stretched for miles along the proposed route.

Hector Nelson had the following places on his plan of arrangements for services—Crowley Camp, Kura Camp, McGirr's Camp, Rodney Camp, Morgan's Camp, Gray's Camp, Stickler's Camp, Robinson's Camp, McGallop's Camp, Larry's Camp, McDonald's Camp, Weedon's Camp, and Roa Camp, and there were others opening up. He was kept more than busy, and found great joy in his work. His visiting was much appreciated. The boarding-house keepers all assisted by giving him a meal whenever he wanted it. Some of the women who kept them were really very fine characters. Their influence upon the conversation of the men was marked, and most noticeable. The order and arrangement of the tables, and the food supplied, was of the best. It was hard work for some of them, but many a word of cheer was given the men to keep straight. While the wives were in the dining-rooms, and did the cooking, in many instances their husbands

worked on the Construction Works. Usually the dining-rooms were situated near a running stream, or spring, and frequently under the shade of some monarch of the forest. The women did not forget their womanhood, and, attractively dressed, they waited on the tables, or supplied refreshments to many of the single men who did not cook their own food.

Hector Nelson had been on the ground about a year, when the Conference came round again. The Report he was able to present stated that the work done more than justified his appointment. It was unanimously decided to continue it. In addition to the Sunday preaching work in the different dining-rooms and open air, Hector started Cottage Meetings during the week. The Engineer and his wife were known as Christian people, and they kindly threw open their house for them. The converts who had been brought in at the previous meetings were welcomed, and some really fine times were experienced. Hector had written to the Church paper, asking for literature to be sent, so that he could distribute it. He had come across cases where many were so eager to read something, that they read everything they could get hold of. In response to his request, large parcels of reading matter were sent along, and he systematically distributed it in the various huts and tents as he went through the different camps.

It was well known when the Bishop had been round. Hector Nelson found it a goodly policy to get amongst the fellows in their separate huts or tents. Many a private conversation he had, and chords were struck which vibrated again after the silence of years. He discovered College men who told him something up to a certain point, then there was a blank. Every one had a history, a skeleton in the cupboard. Some had seen better days, and were trying to get a fresh start. Some had had to pay the penalty of wrongdoing, and were trying to retrieve their lost position. They were buried to the outside world, yet they were in touch, for the weekly newspapers, illustrated so profusely, kept them well supplied with the world's happenings.

One day the news spread through the camps that a Temperance Advocate was to visit them and address meetings. The outside world had been startled from time to time with the news that came from the Front, that a considerable amount of liquor found its way on to the works, and the Temperance Council thought it might be a good thing if their Organiser went through. Before he started, word came that a man to visit those parts needed to stand six feet in height and be a good fighter. In due time numerous placards were prepared and sent into the numerous camps, announcing that Philip Snowden, Temperance Organiser and Advocate, would visit all the camps and address the men on "The Dominion's Greatest Question," and that he would spend several evenings on the Construction Works.

He duly arrived on the works one morning, when he encountered about twenty strong, able-bodied navvies, walking along the line single-file, each carrying a shovel over his shoulder.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said Phil.

"Morning."

Phil commenced to give out his notices stating that a meeting was to be addressed by him in the camp. A huge guffaw of laughter greeted this announcement. "Why, it's as much as your life's worth. People could not do without their liquor here. They are constantly 'shickered' (drunk), and dead marines (empty bottles) are to be seen everywhere. Why, it comes over the hills by the barrel. Jolly time you'll have!"

Phil spotted what he believed to be the leader of the gang, and said—

"How far are you going?"

"Oh, a little way down the line. We're waiting for the ballast rake to come along."

"I'll walk along with you," said Phil. "Been long on the works?"

"Not long. Came up from the South Island. Was saw-milling before I came here."

"Where?"

"Oh, at McCauslands Mill."

" Really, you'll know so-and-so ? "

" Yes. I'm be blowed. Do you know them ? "

" Rather. I've lived over there too."

Phil Snowden found he had captured the situation. The men sat down alongside of the line, pulled out their pipes, and waited for the metal train, for them to unload, to come along. This gave the very opportunity Phil wanted, and for half an hour they plied him with all sorts of questions, in the attempt to bowl him out. This was what Phil enjoyed, and the more they tried the more he scored. Presently the whistle was heard, and the ballast engine rounded the corner.

" Thanks, men, for your attention."

" Glad to have had the chance of hearing you," they replied.

" Don't forget the meeting on the handbills ! "

Phil went on his way rejoicing at the success of his first " No-Licence Meeting " on the works. He then climbed up the hillside to distribute some literature, where a horrible scene presented itself before him.

Oaths were flying thick and fast inside a tent in all directions, and the atmosphere was charged with sulphur fresh from the infernal regions. He had come across a drunken couple, who were suffering the effects of a drinking bout, and were going at it hammer and tongs. Gnashing their teeth, they made ugly faces at each other, besides occasionally using articles of tent furniture on each other's person. Phil could see the whole proceeding from a neighbour's tent. It was five minutes of hell let loose.

" You see now, sir, what we have to encounter and endure in these camps when these people pay a visit to town and come back charged with liquor."

" It's something awful ! "

So Phil thought. It was as if a lion and tiger had entered into a violent and deathlike encounter. The liquor traffic always leaves and carries its trail with it.

Phil Snowden travelled many miles each day, distributing literature, and usually addressed a meeting at night. He met with all kinds of experiences in the bush settlements. Some days he travelled without

seeing any sign of young life, and happened to say how pleased he was to see some young people present at one of his meetings.

"Them's my daughters!" cried the Chairman, with great delight.

At some places he was styled the "Temperance Bloke." Rather a curious incident happened at one place he was to visit. Report said, he was going to get an awful time.

"However," he had replied. "Let 'em all come. I'm going," and he went.

When he got there, he expected a great meeting, but was surprised that only one turned up, and he evidently to see how things were going, and to report to his fellows. Thinking this was strange, he went on further to the next camp to stay the night. On his return, several days later, he discovered the reason for the seeming failure. The telephone had been at work, and each place the "Temperance Advocate" had visited, was asked—

"What's he like?" and the reply came back—

"He's all right. Let him alone."

They did "let him alone," by staying away and boycotting the meeting. The party who told Phil Snowden said—

"It is a great compliment, Mr. Snowden, for they intended giving you an awful time, but when they found you could hold your own, they were not brave enough to carry out their plan."

"Crowley Camp. You'll have a good time there," was the general expression at all the places previously visited.

The building was crowded, and the Bishop of the Railway Construction Camps, the Rev. Hector Nelson, presided. After expressing his pleasure at being present, and sympathy with the movement, he announced that—

"Mr. Philip Snowden, Temperance Organiser and Advocate, will address you, and at the close will be prepared to answer any questions."

Phil Snowden stepped to the front and said—

"Ladies and Gentlemen, our subject this evening

is not limited by religious sects, nor by political parties. Men of all creeds and all opinions have flocked to its standard. Its adherents to-day may be counted by millions. My subject is, The Dominion's Greatest Question. There are other questions before the country, the Land Question, Party Government Question, the Elective Executive Question, the Gambling Question, the Labour Question, but the greatest of all is the Liquor Question. Shall we govern, or shall it? The Liquor Question strikes at the very root of civic and national righteousness. Wherever it goes, it carries its blighting, withering effect. 'You must go down! I'll be on top every time!' is its watchword. It does not know such a thing as liberty. Tyranny is its name.

"I want us to look at the question from several standpoints to-night. How does it effect the Dominion? The liquor traffic is injurious to the financial prosperity of the Dominion. For every £100 spent in purchasing the products of the average business in New Zealand, £37 of the amount is paid in wages; but in the liquor traffic only £7 in wages for every £100 spent in liquor. The money spent in liquor gives employment to 1,509 persons, but if it had been spent in the products of other businesses, it would have given employment to 8,463 persons, or 6,954 more persons than were employed by the traffic. Surely this is a very good reason why you men in these camps should vote out the liquor traffic. How does it affect the liquor seller? The drink mark is upon the seller. There are few publicans who do not in their bodies carry the marks of the trade. Often the publican, his wife, and his family are marked. So dangerous is the traffic, that some publicans have caused their families to live in private houses some distance away from the hotel. Close the bar, and save the publican from himself. The mortality amongst publicans is very high. The liquor traffic is a highly dangerous trade to be engaged in. Stop the trade, and you save the publican from himself.

"Consider the question in relation to health. Strong drink is injurious to health, and this statement is the testimony of the highest and greatest doctors of the

Empire, who have declared that alcohol is injurious to health. Look at it from the victim's standpoint. Every year there marches down to the gates of death in this fair land of New Zealand an awful procession of 1,000 drink victims. Between each poll probably 3,000 fill drunkard's graves. To be well within the mark, say 2,000. Then, if the traffic is allowed to continue, the work will still go on. Wash your hands clear of the blood of your fellow-men by voting for the death of the liquor traffic.

"Again, look at the money wasted in liquor. With a population of 1,088,860 New Zealand is estimated to have spent last year £4,081,161, being an increase on the previous year of £221,791. There can be no sane statesmanship, there can be no worthy recognition of the bearing of Christian principles on social and national life if very serious regard is not paid to the wicked and woeful waste represented by these millions that are spent in alcoholic liquor. That a population of a little over a million should spend in one year more than four millions in intoxicating liquor is a record of wicked waste. The liquor traffic is injurious to the home. Protect it, men and women, by your vote. The liquor traffic is a deadly enemy to your home. It's up to you therefore to hit your enemy hard. Every wretched home is made out of a possibly happy one, therefore do your level best to vote it out."

CHAPTER XX

A SPIRITUAL OASIS

"Talk faith. The world is better off without
Your uttered ignorance and morbid doubt.
If you have faith in God, or man, or self,
Say so; if not, push back upon the shelf
Of silence all your thoughts till faith shall come;
No one will grieve because your lips are dumb."

—ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

PHIL SNOWDEN, in continuing his address, said—

"There is another point or two, and then I shall be glad to answer any questions. Consider this question from a young man's standpoint. It has been said that young New Zealanders do not drink. Whether this was true or otherwise in the past I cannot say, but it is not true at the present time. He gave statistics to prove his point. Look at it from the children's standpoint. Think of it; nearly 2,000 children in our industrial schools. We have high authority for saying that at least 1,600 of them owe their position to drink, and think how pitiable that position is. Think of the lads and lassies who make the brightness of your own home to-day. Think of it. It is stated that there are 30,000 drunkards in this country. Their ranks are yearly thinned by accidents, disease, and death, and whence come the recruits to take their places? From the homes of the people. It is an appalling fact that in the nurseries of to-day are playing the drunkards and criminals of the future. In conclusion, vote out the licence system, because wherever no-licence has been tried, it has been a decided success. It has proved that it is the cure for the present lamentable condition of things."

Philip Snowden sat down amidst rounds of applause. Question after question was asked, and answered. One

young navvy was particularly active, and put nearly thirty questions.

"Any more?" asked the Chairman. "You have given Mr. Snowden a fairly good questioning."

"Yes," said the young navvy. "He has bested us here, but if we could only get him by himself we'd knock spots out of him."

Hearty thanks to Mr. Snowden and the Chairman closed the first Temperance Meeting held in Crowley Camp. After about a month of temperance work at the Front, and amongst the settlers and Construction Camps, Mr. Snowden returned to duties awaiting him elsewhere. The discussion in the Camps in connection with the Temperance Man's successful visit had scarcely died down, for in some the result would never die out, when the Rev. Hector Nelson received word from Mr. Mick O'Rafferty of McDonald's Camp, stating that he was agreeable to sell a portion of his land for Church purposes, to his "Riverence" for £50 the acre. Hector decided to consult the District Connexional Officials about it, so he left the Front for a few days to attend to this business. While he was away he called to see the Rev. Joseph Challenger, who, in course of conversation, stated that amongst his helpers he had two enthusiastic local preachers, who had taken up some land in his circuit, and who had been very much used in conducting Special Meetings. He was driving out to see them about some Church matters, and asked Hector if he would like to go with him. He immediately fell in with the proposal, and said he would be delighted to accompany him. They found those for whom they sought at home.

Hector Nelson was immensely pleased to make the acquaintance of Harry Champness and Jacob Chambers. The outcome of it was that they promised to give him some assistance with his work at the Front. It was decided that they should give the fortnight of moonlight nights during the month to the Construction Camps.

"Shall not miss the time," said Jacob. "Cows are about dry, and a spell from cow-spanking will not do us any harm. Our wives can manage, and they can

have their turn away when we come back. However, the Lord will take care of His own."

Jacob believed that openings were made by the Lord to step into. When they took up the section they made it a matter of prayer, and when they commenced to put in the first bit of work Jacob went down on his knees by the plough, and asked God's blessing, and that He would prosper the undertaking.

"We mun pray about it, lad, and get the right message," he said to Harry Champness.

"When would you like us to come, Maister Nelson?" asked Jacob.

"The sooner the better," replied Hector Nelson. "Let me see, the moon is now past the full. Next moon will do fine, and give me plenty of time to make it known."

"How are we to get out to the Front?" enquired Jacob, who had no idea where the Front was, or what it meant.

"I'll arrange that, and let you know," replied Mr. Nelson.

Hector Nelson returned to his little calico manse at Crowley Camp in high glee. He immediately got to work, and made posters announcing the Mission. It was not long before the mail brought Jacob a letter, which was marked "important."

"Put it on the mantel-piece until thy faither comes in," said Mrs. Chambers, to Agnes, their second daughter.

When Jacob came in for dinner he was given the letter.

"Where's my speck's, mother?"

Jacob's double eyes were soon brought, and he read—

"Crowley Camp,
Manse.

DEAR BRO. CHAMBERS,

Just a line to say arrangements are completed for the Mission, to be conducted by Bro. Champness and yourself. Would you kindly arrange to come out by the train on Friday, as far as McDonald's Camp.

We shall stay there for the night, and hold our first meeting, and then travel by the ballast to the Front on Saturday morning.

Trusting that you are all well, and that we may have a glorious time together.

Faithfully yours,

HECTOR NELSON."

"Eh, wife! Es ta got me things nearly ready?"

"Nearly ready? Why, there's nearly a week yet, Jacob, before thee needs to start."

The week slipped quickly by, and all was in readiness to start for the mission at the Construction Camps. It was as good as a pantomime to see Jacob Chambers enter the railway station carrying his carpet-bag. They had not long to wait for the train to start, so they immediately got their tickets for McDonald's Camp. A policeman was standing by, and heard Jacob say McDonald's Camp, and pricked his ears.

"McDonald's Camp? At last I have got on the track. I'll have to get a search warrant."

He was not long about it. Jacob was tapped on the shoulder.

"Just a minute, please," said the officer of the law.

"I would like to see what is in that bag of yours!"

"Indeed! You won't then. The check of you, to want to poke your nose into my belongings. It's my private property. Surely a man has his rights. It's no-a-but got my Sunday clothes in, and a change of clothing in case I get wet."

"Come, come," said the officer. "I am instructed to search to see whether it contains whisky or grog of any kind. I want to find out whether you are a 'Sly-grog seller.'"

"A what?"

"A 'Sly-grog' seller!"

"No, Mr. Policeman. I bain't be anything of the kind. I don't do anything on the sly. I be quite open in my transactions. I just be a 'umble man, who came to New Zealand and took up a section upon which I work, and on Sundays I does a bit of local preaching,

and am now on the way to help to conduct a mission amongst the navvies out at McDonald's Camp, and other places on the Construction Works."

"I thought you were a 'Sly-grogger.' You looked like a stranger in these parts, and we have to keep an eye on strangers carrying bags like yours on to the works."

"I mun get along, or I'll miss the train, and this would be awkward to Maister Nelson at the other end, as we are to hold our first meeting to-n-e-c-t."

Dingle! Dingle! went the bell.

"All aboard for McDonald's Camp."

"You've made a mistake this time, guvernor. I ain't a whisky man. Here's our Circuit Plan, and 'Jacob Chambers, Local Preacher,' on it."

Jacob scored, and scored heavily, and the man in blue found he was on the wrong track.

"Just fancy!" said Jacob to Harry, as the train moved out of the station. "He took me for a 'Sly-grog' seller!"

"What's that?" asked Harry, for they were both new to Colonial ways.

"A man who sells grog on the sly, I suppose," replied Jacob. "Paul the Apostle speaks of being branded, and carrying marks, but I am surprised that an officer of the Force should mistake a local preacher for a 'Sly-grog' seller. Have to get the Government to buy him a pair of spectacles," concluded Jacob.

They had many a good laugh at Jacob's expense.

"Bless me! After all these years to be taken for a 'Sly-grog' seller!"

They were immensely interested in the country through which they passed. The opening-up of new country away-back was a surprise to them. In due time they arrived at their destination. The deep railway cuttings, embankments, and tunnels, all added interest to the journey.

"McDonald's Camp! McDonald's Camp!" called the porter.

Jacob clung tenaciously to his carpet-bag. The

missioners were considerably relieved when they saw and heard the cheery voice of Hector Nelson.

"You've arrived all right, I trust," said Mr. Nelson.

"Nearly got run in, though," said Jacob.

"How's that? Been misbehaving yourselves," asked Mr. Nelson, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Noa," replied Harry Champness. "It was Jacob's carpet-bag that did it. The man in blue thought he was a 'Sly-grog' seller, and wanted to go through his bag."

They all had another hearty laugh at this.

"Come along."

Hector took them to the Camp Boarding House, where an enjoyable tea was supplied, and all felt the better for it.

After refreshing the inner man they went into the open air. Standing on a stack of sleepers, Hector Nelson commenced the proceedings by the trio singing—

"Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee."

Their strong voices blended splendidly, and as they carried a considerable distance a large crowd was soon attracted.

Hector Nelson introduced the visitors. Several hymns were sung, and Jacob Chambers gave a few words of exhortation, and invited everybody to come along to the Dining Room Meeting. A large crowd assembled, and Harry Champness was announced to give the address.

"Men and women, I'm a plain Lancashire man, who has to earn his living like yourselves, but I have a message for you. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. This saying was a favourite in the Apostle Paul's day. It is the joy of millions of persons to-day. Look at the saying. It tells us that Jesus is the Saviour of sinners. We may all claim Him. It tells us that He likes to save the chief of sinners, because the salvation of great sinners glorifies Christ's power and mercy, and encourages other great sinners to come to him, and often produces

the best converts. He wants to save you, and make the best possible characters out of you. Will you let Him ? "

A great impression was created before the meeting closed, and many accepted " the faithful saying " as their own.

The visit of these warm-hearted men to the Railway Construction Camps was signally owned of God. They had wonderful power in all the camps, and night after night they told and showed that the Old, Old Story is true.

It was a wisely ordained plan that brought Hector Nelson and these simple though spiritually-minded men together, and their visit showed more than ever that God chooses the weak and often insignificant men and things of this world and the most unlikely men to do His work, and that He had His own particular way of training His workers. The Mission throughout the camps came to a close all too soon. A public thanksgiving meeting was held ere they departed, and their favourite hymn was—

" To God be the glory, great things He hath done."

CHAPTER XXI

A LIQUOR LICENCE GRANTED

"Wherever God erects a house of prayer,
 The devil's sure to build a chapel there;
 And 'twill be found upon examination,
 The latter has the larger congregation."

GREAT success is often followed by a reaction. Elijah's success on Carmel seemed a long way off from "What dost thou hear, Elijah?" Yet it was the same man under different conditions. His success on Carmel was tremendous. Yet he is under the juniper tree. It is a matter of history that when the pendulum swings forward, it also very often, unless great care is exercised, swings backwards. So it was in connection with the moral and religious work in the Construction Camps. Those opposed to good influences kept steadily at work, and one day it was rumoured that a large, new two-storied boarding-house was to be erected in Crowley Camp, as this was likely to be a permanent settlement. People were delighted at this piece of news, and gave the matter favourable commendation. It was to be a very servicable building, and a place for strangers to stay at. It was not long before the building was ready for opening. It was near the end of the quarter, and it was to be opened about the first of the month. Some who were observant noticed that special attention was being paid to the fittings in one of the front rooms. The time went on, and one day Crowley Camp was startled to learn that a Liquor Licence had been forced upon them. The promoters of the new boarding-house had manipulated the wires. A licence had been allowed to lapse in another part, and a new one issued, to take its place at Crowley Camp.

Immediately this was known, indignation meetings

were held throughout the camps, and resolutions of protest and petitions were signed and forwarded to the authorities ; but the reply came back that it was too late. It was felt that the inhabitants of the camps had been badly treated at not being consulted in this matter. The committee stated that so many reports of " Sly-grog " selling had reached their ears that they thought a licence would save the situation.

Hector Nelson and Ralph Messenger went in and appeared in person before the Minister of Justice to ask for its repeal, and pleaded, but to no purpose. A licence had been thrust upon them. It was not long before the bar was in full blast in the manufacture of drunkards. The results were soon apparent on the works and through the settlements. The only thing to do, said the authorities, was to vote it out at the next poll. It unfortunately developed, like most of the out-of-way public-houses in the Dominion, into a mere drinking-shop. Men filled it every night, and gave their hard-earned money to the publican, and he in return gave them sore heads.

Ralph Messenger noticed a considerable difference in the men, and the place became worse and worse. One night the drinkers took possession, and went upstairs into a room where a young boarder was sleeping. They dragged him out of his bed, and rushed him on to the balcony, hung him over it in his shirt, and threatened to drop him to the ground if he would not shout or pay for more drink for them. He was decidedly opposed to this, but to save his life this had to be done. This was quite a common occurrence. Travellers who, not knowing the condition of things, put up for the night, had frequently to get up and walk several miles into another settlement where there was no liquor sold to stay the night. " Lambing down " was quite a frequent occurrence. One Tuesday a visitor arrived from the country further back with a sum of money amounting to £415. By the Saturday night he had only £32 left. One evening he was supposed to have consumed thirteen bottles of champagne amongst six or seven people. When he came to himself, his money

was gone. He had played the fool, and, like many others, he found that the way of transgressors is hard.

About this time a move was made to secure a medical man for the works and settlements, as the cost in case of an accident or sickness was prohibitive. One day a Dr. Doherty arrived with his wife and family, and took up his residence, and, having shown his credentials, commenced to practise in the district. His arrival was heralded with delight. It was not long, however, before it was discovered that he was a great drinker. His experiences while visiting soon made him an unwelcome visitor. Sometimes he would fall across the patient's bed in a drunken condition, at other times, on entering the room, he would commence to pull all the clothes off the bed. Such proceedings soon terrified intending patients, and one visit was usually sufficient. Further, he had set several broken bones in such an unsatisfactory manner, that many patients would be handicapped as long as life lasted.

The climax to his extraordinary proceedings took place when a young fellow was brought in from one of the blocks further inland, where, while bush-falling, he was jammed between two trees and had his leg broken. The sufferer was placed on a packhorse at nine o'clock on the previous morning, carried over a rough track, and then put on a stretcher, and carried several miles in a waggon to Crowley Camp for medical attention. He was taken to the hotel, and the doctor sent for. The poor fellow suffered intensely, and the doctor was too drunk to attend to his injuries. The young fellow spent the night calling for the doctor, but, alas! in vain. His cries for relief could be heard several chains away. At last some one thought of Ralph Messenger, and he was sent for. Ralph came along as quickly as he could, rendered first aid, and recommended that he be sent to the hospital without delay. After enduring excruciating pain, Ralph made him as comfortable as possible, and packed him off to the hospital by the ballast train. Still the doctor kept on drinking. On another occasion a poor fellow

was brought in with inflammation and taken to the hotel. After calling in agony hopelessly all night for the doctor to come, he died, when Dr. Doherty could have rendered relief had he been sober. The indignation against the liquor traffic bar became intense. "We must have it out of this!" was the almost unanimous resolve.

They set to work, but it could not be done at once. One day, as the Rev. Hector Nelson was going to post some letters, the doctor's wife rushed to the door, and hailed him.

"Come at once, Mr. Nelson, the doctor's dying."

Hector Nelson hurried in, and found him in a state of collapse. Hot mustard poultices were quickly applied to the back of his neck. The doctor began to revive, and after a time Mr. Nelson left. This was the beginning of the end. The wife was almost as fond of liquor as the doctor. One day she was taken out of the township to a neighbouring hospital, and died as the result of alcoholic drinking, and found a drunkard's grave. The doctor propped up the public-house verandah a few more times, and then the news flashed through the camp that the old doctor had passed out.

A No-Licence was coming on, and all over twenty years of age and who were on the Electoral Roll could vote. There were three issues on the ballot paper—

I vote that Licences be continued.

I vote that Licences be reduced.

I vote that No Licences be issued.

There was great excitement in the Construction Camps. They had not forgotten Phil Snowden's visit and the information that he placed before them. His earnest pleading and advocacy was still fresh in their memory.

The all-important day at last arrived. When the figures went up it was discovered that Crowley Camp had lost its licence. There was great cheering, and a few "Boo-h-oos!" from Mr. Thirsty and his friends. But, above it all, a feeling of great thankfulness was felt. They had seen what the liquor licence could do. The wreckage had been tremendous, so tremendous

that it was a great relief to know that Bung & Co. had been defeated.

A public Thanksgiving Service was held, and largely attended. Mr. Nelson told how liquor had no respect either for the living or dying, and said he had had to minister to the needs of a poor fellow who was dying, and as he was praying, and helping the poor soul "over the river" the passage outside of the room was filled with men drinking and swearing, every word of which he could hear. Such a traffic had no right to continue, said Mr. Nelson.

It was a thankful people that sang the Doxology when the licenced bar and liquor traffic were driven out of the Railway Construction Camps—gun, stock and barrel.

Ralph Messenger kept working away quietly. He did his best to establish libraries and reading-rooms in the camps, so that the men could spend their time better. He told the men not to measure their job entirely by the size of the pay-envelope, or the length of the vacation; highway robbery was an ideal vocation measured in these ways. He taught them that nothing was of real value in the world except people. "Never hurt a person by a wrong thought, or by a word, or by an act. Never hurt each other. Then go on a big discovering expedition, and find each other. You must never say, 'That person has nothing in him,' for that only means that you have not found it yet. Then, last of all, never think you are the only person. You are just part of each other. You are not somebody, and the rest of us everybody else. We are each other. Life is each other-ness, not everybody else-ness."

Ralph's consistent life enabled him to give such talks as this—which he occasionally did in the evening—much force, and they were thoroughly appreciated; like *Oliver Twist*, they asked for more. Often as he sat alone in his tent at night his thoughts went out again in the direction of Frank Templeton, whom he had nursed when he was suffering from supposed small-pox, and whom he left on the Wellington Wharf.

Would they all meet again? He had met the two men who had conducted open-air services on the deck, and recognised them in the persons of Harry Champness and Jacob Chambers; but where was the third, a Mr. John Stubberfield and his daughter? Would they all meet again? 'Tis said the world is not so very wide after all. Time would tell.

Ralph was now taking his last year's examination and course in Engineering. He would be glad when he was through. He would then feel more free, and, after all, examination work on the top of a heavy day's work and responsibility became a great strain. However, the work was progressing satisfactorily, and they were getting further and further back from civilisation.

The Dining Rooms were not only beneficial to the camps, but to some of the young fellows who passed in and out to their sections away-back. There arrived one day a stranger, a young fellow who was on his way to look at a section which he had successfully secured at the recent land ballot. He was well dressed, and asked if he could be supplied with dinner at Crowley Boarding House. Miss Edith Barlow served him with a suitable dinner. Everything was so good, clean, and appetising.

"I have struck a patch to-day," said he. "This is all right." Paying his fare, he left, and resumed his journey. "I have fallen on my feet to-day," he said to himself. "I will call again when I am going in, and out, to my new section."

The speaker was none other than Ralph Messenger's supposed small-pox patient, whom we left on Wellington wharf on his liberation from quarantine. He had got a job at cow-spanging on a good farm and in a good home, and, having saved sufficient money, he decided to take up a bush-section on his own. He had been attracted by the information advertised that the railway now being constructed would pass by it. Like all other young fellows he had thoughts for the future, and his success at the ballot, and even his journey in, had helped to mature them.

CHAPTER XXII

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN

"Unstained, unwhipped by passion or desire,
 A thing clean, strong, and true uplifts its head
 Above all grosser things for sale or hire,
 Above the grasping hand for gain outspread."

—THOMAS WADE.

RALPH MESSENGER had carried through the work over which he had been placed as Inspector so well, and had won the confidence and respect of the men to such a degree, that Mr. Glasson the Engineer said to him—

"Messenger, how would you like to get a practical knowledge of tunnel work? I have a good practical man there now, and if you care to go on with him as his assistant, it would give you a fine opportunity. Think it over, and let me know."

Ralph thanked him, and expressed his willingness to accept such an appointment. The men over whom he had charge were sorry to lose him, but Ralph explained the position to them, and they were satisfied. He thought it would be wise to gain a thorough knowledge of everything first hand as far as possible, and studied the plans prepared by the engineer, and ascertained all about its dimensions, which he found to be—Length, 32 chains; height from floor to roof, 17 feet 1 inch clear; roof blocks were to be 15 inches in thickness, and the walls 14 inches in thickness. He then decided to pay a visit of inspection to the work at either end, and get to know every detail.

The sides of the tunnel were concreted, and the top blocked with concrete blocks. Two sacks of concrete were used to the yard of metal for the sides, and more if needed. The men were employed night and day, the metal coming up from the ballast pit for concrete purposes, which, after it was mixed, was put into a

wooden frame fourteen inches wide, and thus the walls were built up to where the curve of the roof commenced, when, by means of a wooden arch, the concrete blocks specially made to fit at the ballast pit, were sent up all ready made, to place in position as the work proceeded. He found a hive of industry. Men were fully occupied at different kinds of work. Some were mixing concrete, some were busily employed carpentering, making the frames and timber for the supports, for every bit of work was strongly and securely done. The framework of the tunnel was most interesting, and such care was generally exercised that, humanly speaking, it was almost impossible to meet with an accident, as the timber supports were kept close up to the "face" or position being excavated. The position of the man working right up at the roof of the "face" was rather lonely, as he had to work principally alone, as there was not sufficient room for an assistant. Many of the men preferred to work underground to being on the top, or in the open. So this important work went on. The men employed in this class of work were of the finest type of character—carpenters, navvies, and workmen from all parts.

Ralph went down, down until he reached the bottom. The men were having their dinner, so this gave him a good opportunity of seeing the kind of work which was being undertaken. There was a very large filling to be filled, so all the material from the tunnel quickly found a resting-place.

The way in which a tunnel is made, is by putting in a drive through the hill, possibly about seven or eight feet high, as preliminary work. This is very securely timbered; strong posts and cross-pieces are all tightly fitted together. It is almost impossible for it to cave in, or slip. A tremendous lot of timber is used.

Dan Fulton was foreman at this end, and he had consented to take Ralph in before the trucks started to run again. Provided with a piece of candle, they entered the long drive, with its carefully timbered roof overhead, and tram rails beneath their feet. Over the wet muddy bottom they travelled. Every twenty

yards or so a candle projected out of the sides of the drive. The air was none too good, at any rate to a new-comer, although one got accustomed to it after being in the drive some time. After a good walk they reached the "face," or head, where the men were working. Yards of loose papa rock lay at their feet.

Prior to leaving for dinner, the men had fired a shot and blasted the solid formation, and several truckloads of loose material now lay ready for trucking.

It was not long before Ralph got a thorough knowledge of everything pertaining to the work of tunnel construction—how to start ; how to carry it on ; and how it should be finished. The Inspector decided that Ralph and he should take week about turns as regards the shift work, especially as they worked in day and night shifts. Everything was going well, and they were anxious to get this tunnel through as quickly as possible, so that material could be carted through it and further on to the Front.

At McGirr's Camp, where Ralph resided for this piece of work, they had commenced to take it out to its full width, and blocks were placed in position nearly up to the face, as most of the material taken out was needed for filling on the Rodney Camp side. One day it was reported that they had come into a particularly soft and bad bit of ground. Exceptional care was taken, and the roof and timbering was more than usually heavy, and it was thought that the worst was past. In the middle of the night shift the "danger signal" sounded, and it was seen that the ground was beginning to "creep" and slide. Ralph was quickly on the spot, and enquired whether all the men were safe. They were counted, and it was discovered that the three or four men working at the "face" had not got out. Ralph, never seeing danger himself, was soon to the rescue.

"We can save them, if we do not tarry. Come on, men!" he cried, and seizing a shovel and a pick he heartened and stirred the rescuing party forward.

"Look out!"

The warning came too late. Ralph Messenger and his companions were entombed, and in danger. Gathering up his courage, he exclaimed—

"Men, by God's help we can get out of this!"

After working some time they evolved a passage through which they could crawl. Now for another attack.

"We must reach the other fellows! Now, men! One, two, three! Hip-ray, Hip-ray, Hip-ray!"

Here goes. They worked away for a lengthy period, when at last they heard the sound of tapping, and thrust in a pipe, and through this tube supplied the entombed men with food and water.

"Keep your spirits up, men! We'll rescue you, or die in the attempt," declared Messenger.

Hour after hour they worked, when Ralph shouted—"Hold on a little longer, and we will reach you. Any one hurt?"

"Yes! Bill Simmons is crushed a bit, and Tom Rogers cut about."

"Keep your spirits up a bit longer!" shouted Ralph.

Hurrah! At last the entombed men are reached!

"We'll soon get you out to the daylight!"

After a good deal of lifting the injured men were got to the tramway and placed in a truck, and soon taken to one of the sheds, where beds had been made in readiness. Plenty of hot water and bandages were ordered to be on the spot ready for action when the men reached the building.

"Now, in the absence of a doctor, follow my instructions," cried Ralph. "I will render first aid, and make them as comfortable as possible, and you men have the ballast engine and guard's van ready to run them into the Hospital. I will go in with them."

Meanwhile, work was suspended in the tunnel, until an enquiry was held. In due time the men were safely housed in the hospital. The doctor made a very careful examination, and pronounced two of the cases very serious; the other two escaped with a broken limb each and a shaking. Having seen the men safely into the

hands of the hospital authorities, Ralph returned to the works.

In a few days an enquiry was made which revealed that the accident was entirely unforeseen and unavoidable. A spring had been tapped, and with the undermining had collapsed without any warning. They set to work and repaired the damage, and cleared away the débris.

Ralph Messenger was acclaimed a hero. He declared he had only done his duty, and asked them to say nothing about it. But it leaked out, and all who knew declared that he had done a noble piece of work in risking his life for the salvation of his fellow-men. They declared his action was of the noblest character. It was reported to the Royal Humane Society, and this time they decided that "we award to Ralph Messenger, of the Railway Construction Camps, both a Certificate of Merit and a Gold Medal." It was resolved that the English Society be also communicated with, and that he be recommended for the Order of Merit, and that it be brought under the notice of the king.

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"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

The sound of electric bells and others repeated and repeated again mingled itself suddenly with the harsh roar of the traffic that never-ceasingly rolls or rushes down Fleet Street, London. Half a dozen policeman speedily shut off traffic and foot-passengers from the east, and another six from the west, so that a long stretch of the street was clear. Into this galloped or raced the huge, red-painted fire-engine, the very sight of whose spick and span severity at any time is calculated to thrill the dullest, the men bounding off with alacrity ere they stopped, racing each other to their places as coolly as if on a stage. Six policemen held back a crowd of many hundreds, all the time heaving and pushing, yet patient as the London crowd ever is, the whole parting occasionally as if by magic.

The men seemed like so many agile monkeys—armies here, parties there, all doing their own bit of

work, all slaving at it like lions—some setting ladders, several getting ready the automatic ladder that throws out length after length of the titanic hose already on it, with its huge brass nozzle set on a stand, all ready as soon as a man was there. Up he ran, like a gibbon, up and up to the top.

Lines of smoke, innocent-looking ribbons through the cracks above the closed windows, were chased by belching volumes of black smoke and cruel flames that sent the glass of the windows crashing to the path below, and the roof was seen to be a veritable cone of fire. Apparently into its very mouth the firemen ran; just as the wind, suddenly treacherous, as if from sheer malice, sent the whole force of fire and flying splinters and glass towards them. As soon as the flames subsided a little, a strange sight was to be seen, for heavy jets of water now burst through from the fire to the street—the firemen were inside the building. One could see their lanterns, like fireflies when a merciful blackness reigned.

A tragic interlude took place before the fire was eventually put out, for a man ran in, coatless and hatless, and up to what was left of the second flat, and fumbled frantically among the charred contents—possibly, it was surmised, for a safe. With flames still raging above, and only lantern-light in the smouldering gloom below, the incident made a grim picture. The firemen, cool still, though grimy, looked at through magnifying-glasses as if they had done nothing. Then, to their engines and their motors, the men sprang, and sped away, ready for the next call. Fire is a good servant but a bad master. Fires, however, are good purifiers, and while they are destructive, yet they sometimes clean and clear up, if it be only mystery. It was so in this case, in more ways than one. The man who was seen in the building, fumbling amongst the charred contents, we have seen before. He was one of George Messenger's pals—a sharper, who knew more than he cared to divulge. When the drink is in, all the wit goes out.

George Messenger had gone under, and after his

wife's death, never turned up at his old home, and it was soon broken up. He had always taken a certain amount of pride in his son Ralph, and when primed with drink did a great deal of boasting about what his son Ralph could do, and talked more than was wise. He told how Ralph worked at John McGregor & Co.'s, and how they had promoted him, and how he carried the keys and opened up the works, and locked up at night. In an ordinary London public-house bar there are usually a lot of hangers-on and pot-house loafers, as well as sharpers. And one evening, while George Messenger, fuddled with drink, was talking excitedly and incoherently, a man named John Sturgess, spieler, forger, and house-breaker, drew near, and listened attentively. He heard the boasting by Messenger of what his son Ralph could do, and thought "Here's game! I will wait my chance, and play my cards accordingly."

He got into the favour of George Messenger, and before the home was broken up, and while George was trying to drown any remorse that he might have in drink, he asked Sturgess to his home.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ENGINEER IN THE MAKING

"Never think that God's delays are God's denials. Hold on; hold fast; hold out. Patience is genius. If there be no enemy, no fight; if no fight, no victory; if no victory, no crown."

THIS was just what Sturgess wanted, and while George was out of the room his opportunity came. He had chosen an evening for his visit when Ralph was at the night classes. George Messenger was out getting a bottle of beer from the nearest public-house. Sturgess was alone, and acting on his old professional lines, soon had his hand in an overcoat pocket, which proved to be Ralph's. In this pocket was kept the key of the works.

Sturgess was an old hand at the game and drew a plan of the entrance key for future service. He also extracted a letter with the signature of "John McGregor" in it. This he also noted.

George Messenger returned with his bottle of beer none the wiser, not knowing what had happened during his absence, for Mr. Sturgess was much interested in reading a book which he had taken from the book-shelf. The evening passed, and Ralph returned and went to bed, little dreaming of what had happened while he was away at the evening classes. Having sucked George Messenger like an orange, Sturgess threw him over, and he got lower and lower until he became literally an outcast, and ultimately was run over by a coach and killed instantaneously. He was picked up dead, and buried in the stranger's plot in the cemetery.

One cannot get the better of a London policeman, and the police watched the coatless, hatless man

fumbling for the safe. It was not long before one of them recognised him as "a man wanted." Signalling to his mates, they surrounded him, and placed him under their special care. They then took possession of the safe, and, on opening it, found it full of valuable goods and papers, also a complete set of burglar's tools. All of these they conveyed to the police station.

The man they discovered to be none other than our acquaintance, John Sturgess, by profession—sharper, spicler, forger, and house-breaker. He was badly burnt, and they took him to the hospital infirmary. He did not seem to improve, and one day the doctor shook his head, and stated the case was hopeless, as the shock had been too severe for the system. The news was conveyed to him that he had not many days or perhaps hours to live, and if he had any message to leave, he had better make it, before it was too late. He was asked if he would like to see any particular minister. He said, yes, he would like to see Peter Thompson.

When this good-hearted, burly minister got the news, he immediately went to the gaol and found John Sturgess' days numbered.

After an introduction, Sturgess said—

"I have a confession to make. Put it down, Parson, please. Years ago I duplicated a key, which enabled me to break into John McGregor & Co.'s Ironfounder's Establishment. I also stole and forged their signature to a cheque, and to cover up my crime set fire to their premises. My crime was undiscovered, and a young man named Messenger had to pay the penalty. As I am dying, I want to make this known."

He then told the story as we know it.

"Will you sign this?" asked Mr. Thompson.

"Yes, I will sign it."

Calling in the gaoler and the doctor as witnesses, John Sturgess signed this statement as true in the sight of God. Shortly afterwards he passed away.

Peter Thompson prayed with him ere the end came, and all they could do was to tell him of the Christ

that saved even the dying thief. Peter Thompson thought—

"Messenger? Messenger? Why, that's the name of the young fellow who was converted in our Mission, and had to serve two year's probation. Yes! Ralph Messenger. I will see the firm of John McGregor & Co. in the morning about it."

The Rev. Peter Thompson was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet, and at nine o'clock he was at the office of John McGregor & Co. and asked if they remembered a young man by the name of Ralph Messenger working for them, and who was supposed to have got into trouble and forfeited their confidence some years ago.

"Yes," said the head of the firm. "I remember him very well. In fact, shall never forget him. I was never so much surprised and deceived in any one in my life. I expected great things from him. His life seemed so full of promise."

The Rev. Peter Thompson listened, and when Mr. McGregor had finished, said—

"He came to me. Got converted in our Mission, and told his story, declared his innocence, and then, after serving his probation, went abroad. It has now come to my knowledge that he was not guilty of the charges brought against him, and here is a signed statement giving evidence of that fact."

Mr. McGregor took and read the signed document of John Sturgess, duly witnessed. When he had finished his face was a study. Ralph Messenger was innocent after all. They had been too hasty. They had blighted a young man's career. How could he be found? How could they sufficiently compensate him?

The Rev. Peter Thompson left John McGregor a broken-down man. Full of remorse he went about his work. He was a changed man, and he called himself a Christian. Had he acted as such? He inwardly groaned, for his conscience said No! If they could only find him, perhaps they could atone. John McGregor called the other members of the firm together, and laid the position before them. They decided that they would

advertise, and see if they could find a trace of the wrongly accused man.

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Ralph Messenger, quite unconscious of what was happening in England, determined to do his utmost to improve his position by occupying his spare time in self-culture. During this time he developed his mental faculties, and one day he received the welcome news that he had, with credit to himself, completed the Four Years' Course of Engineering in connection with the International Correspondence Schools with honour and distinction to himself. He was now entitled to style himself Civil Engineer. Having passed several examinations in Engineering, he was now able to take levels, and calculate the quantity of material that would have to be shifted, and the depths of cuttings and height of embankments, etc., and make flying surveys. He thoroughly understood the best way to get through the swampy country, and was ready for any emergency. His opportunity came when the Chief Engineer, Mr. Glasson, was called away to undertake the supervision and the carrying out of important work in another part of the Dominion.

"Who can take your place?" asked the Minister for Public Works.

"Ralph Messenger," was the prompt reply.

"Do you think him capable?"

"Yes! As capable as I am," replied Mr. Glasson.

"Right! He shall have the position," replied the Minister of Public Works.

When it was known that Ralph Messenger was to be the new Engineer, cheer upon cheer went through the camps, and the men determined to do their level best to carry out his instructions. They arranged a banquet in honour of his promotion, and presented him with an Address of Appreciation.

Ted Stokes acted as spokesman, and eulogised Mr. Messenger on behalf of the men. He was a good "boss." He was sympathetic, and had the happy knack of getting the right side of the men, and, as a result, he

got the best out of them. They would never have any labour troubles with such as he at the head of them. Speech after speech followed, and when Mr. Messenger rose to speak he was treated to an ovation, and the men rose in a body and sang—

"For he's a jolly good fellow."

His reply appealed to the men to cultivate the best side of their nature.

"Keep pure! Put your foot on every form of evil, and keep it there," he said. "If you would succeed, cultivate self-improvement in your leisure time. Men, you can do it. Perhaps you will pardon a personal reference, by way of encouragement. When I came here I was just like one of yourselves, but I determined to keep myself straight, and go in for self-improvement, by means of the International School of Correspondence. You can get on. There is plenty of room on the top. I would like you now to give three good hearty cheers for Mr. Glasson, our late Engineer, and wish him God-speed."

At this stage Mr. Dobelling, the member for the district, arrived, and stated it gave him much pleasure to be present, and congratulated Mr. Messenger on attaining his present position. He remembered being present on a former occasion when he had the privilege of presenting Mr. Messenger with the "Public's" appreciation of heroic conduct. He was glad of his success. He could only reiterate what he said on a former occasion, "You are a credit to your King and country."

Referring to the work they were now constructing, Mr. Dobelling said satisfactory progress was being made. Fifteen years ago the journey along this route used to occupy seven days in the making, now, with the advent of the railway, up to the present it could be done in one. Surveyors were pushing on their work, and had reached McGallop's Camp. The greatest engineering difficulty now confronting the Department was some heavy tunnelling. One tunnel was to be nearly a mile in length, and was rather an extra-

ordinary one, as far as engineering was concerned, since two shafts, each over 30 feet deep, had to be sunk before a level could be made to take them into the next valley.

"Another engineering difficulty will be to get through the Rakau Gorge, and it is understood that a tunnel a mile and a quarter long will require to be driven. Notwithstanding these difficulties, I believe the line will be completed in five years, for great activity is being shown by the Public Works Department in pushing on the work."

"In conclusion," said Mr. Dobelling, "I think those in charge have done wonders, and ought to be thanked and congratulated by every one for their perseverance and despatch in putting the line through almost a continual swamp and such country in such quick time, so ably directed by such a man at the head of affairs as Mr. Glasson. We feel sure that Mr. Messenger will be well backed up by the loyalty of you men; if you do your part the undertaking will be successfully accomplished."

The banquet was a huge success, and Ralph Messenger entered upon his new duties in the most auspicious manner.

Ralph's recipe for success was: "Keep your head cool—your feet warm—your mind busy. Don't worry over trifles. Plan your work ahead; then stick to it rain or shine. Don't waste sympathy on yourself. If you are a gem, someone will find you. Don't whine. Tell people you are a failure, and they will believe you. Talk and act like a winner, and in time you will become one."

No one rejoiced at Ralph's success more than the Rev. Hector Nelson. Although they did not see so much of each other, yet Ralph was always ready to help Mr. Nelson in any way that he could. The Mission to the Construction Camps and workers was a great boon to the men. They had also succeeded in establishing a small Sunday School in each camp, and through the children many parents had been reached.

Hector Nelson travelled up and down on the ballast

trucks visiting the men in their camps, the navvies and workers in the tunnels, and he became very familiar with every class of work. His presence, even if he did not say much, acted as a deterrent.

"We like his riverence to come amongst us; he keeps us in order," said Dan Maloney.

Sometimes outside visitors would pay a visit to see how the work was progressing. A day came when a Salvationist found his way along, collecting for the self-denial funds, and circulating and selling the *War Cry*. Of course, he called on the Engineer, and Ralph not only assisted, but bought a *Cry*. Little did he dream of what this was to lead to, however; he knew that it is the little things that very often change the whole course of one's life.

CHAPTER XXIV

RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION IS NOT AN EASY JOB

"Through the mould and through the clay,
Through the corn and through the hay,
By the margin of the lake,
O'er the river, through the brake,
On we hie with screech and roar,
 Splashing ! Flashing !
 Crashing ! Dashing !"

It was a tremendous work that Ralph Messenger and his staff were engaged in. Railway construction ? Yes, Railway Construction. The country, alas ! does not always realise the vast importance of the work done by the navvies and tunnel builders. Many of the men are practically isolated, but with their wives and families living in tents and calico houses, but all helping to build up the national greatness.

Onward lay broken country, and a great quantity of filling was being undertaken by men who were breaking down the hillsides and making cuttings, deviating the vexatious and troublesome meandering creek in the winding valley below. On went the work. For miles ahead pegs and sticks marked the route of the surveyed track for the future "iron horse." Truly, life at the Front of Railway Construction was full of interest. Surveying, clearing the bush, draining the swamps, filling in huge gullies, making big cuttings, building bridges, boring tunnels—all require a master-mind to direct operations.

Ralph Messenger had started at the lowest rung of the ladder, and had now reached the top. The years had brought great changes to him ; but it had meant hard work. But, then, nothing succeeds like success. Let it be known that a man is a successful man, and he

becomes even more successful. So it proved to be in Ralph's case.

The work proceeded apace. The question of railway construction had been discussed rather warmly in Parliament. Some asserted that slow progress was being made. The Minister for Public Works invited the critics to settle the question by seeing for themselves, and arranged a Parliamentary picnic and for them to visit the works and see for themselves.

"The very thing," said the Prime Minister, the Hon. Johnson Backhouse.

This special picnic was duly provided for, and, drawn by special engines, the party arrived on the ground.

Ralph Messenger, the Engineer, was apprised of their coming, and was asked to have in readiness plenty of hot water; they would bring the hampers of provisions with them. Dinner was laid in the "bush," and then it was the Engineer's duty to show them round and give any information that he could. They were shown the various things of interest on such works, and were taken in a truck into the tunnel to get some idea of how the work was done. After a thorough inspection of the works, some thought they would like a walk up the fern-clad gully along which the line was pegged out to travel.

Edna Stanton, the Premier's niece, had come with the party, as well as other ladies, and while crossing a plank over a creek unfortunately tripped, and slipped into the water. Ralph, who was following behind, immediately saw the situation, and quickly rescued her from the awkward position. Miss Stanton kindly recognised his gentlemanly action. Finding that she was uncomfortably wet, he arranged for her to be taken to Mrs. Crockett's Boarding House, where Miss Barlow very kindly attended to her requirements.

Edna Stanton was grateful, and expressed to Mr. Messenger her deep sense of gratitude for his consideration and thoughtfulness for her comfort. The Prime Minister also noticed it as a very gallant action, and thoroughly appreciated the Engineer's chivalry on

behalf of his favourite niece, who was almost like an adopted daughter. She had lived with them so long that they looked upon her as one of themselves. She went about with them a great deal.

The Parliamentary party had a good look over the works, and were convinced that the undertaking was progressing admirably, and that no railway could progress quicker without more money and men. They also interviewed many of the settlers along the line, and discovered that the settlement of the country was satisfactory. The general feeling of the settlers with regard to the future was a sanguine one. The Government valuer had recently put up the unimproved and capital value of the land very substantially. In one case the valuation of a section had been raised from 17s. to £11 10s. per acre. Probably over the entire district the valuations would be trebled.

The party returned to their duties in Wellington with a better conception of things, and decided that railway construction was not an easy job. They decided to hasten its completion by putting on more men, and Ralph received this piece of news with satisfaction.

The line was now ready for opening as far as Crowley Camp, and they were just about to tap Bonser's Saddle, and then they would enter coal-bearing country. It was decided to transfer the Engineer's headquarters to this spot. It was not long before there sprang up, even more abundantly, a galvanised iron and canvas township. The trouble so far was the cartage, and it was acute. The road, being just about level with a swamp, with the wet weather soon got into a most deplorable condition. Delays as a consequence were numerous, and this condition of affairs was likely to continue until the spring was well advanced.

Some idea of the difficulty will be gained if it is pointed out that the cartage of a single 24 ft. rail cost over seven shillings. Streams had to be diverted and side drains completed. This was really the heaviest part of the railway construction work, especially through slushy, heavily timbered country. The con-

struction of the drains was more like stumping than anything else. The work was anything but pleasant, though the men in the worst places were provided with gum-boots. The work, however, in the winter was very disagreeable, for the formation was almost as bad as the roads themselves.

Bonser's Saddle Camp soon had a township. There were a couple of grocer's shops, a hairdresser, two billiard saloons, and several boarding-houses of the bush type. The larger number of men on the works would probably make this their headquarters, stated Mr. Messenger. One of the great drawbacks in the construction of this line was the necessity for hauling the ballast so many miles, as there was no ballast in the districts through which the line had been constructed. It was hoped, however, that before long a good shell rock pit would be encountered and developed, which would reduce the cost in this connection very considerably.

Bonser's Camp soon became one of great animation, for here the line tapped a great coalfield, waiting to be developed, as soon as the line was completed. Those interested had left no stone unturned to get the railway into it. The Railway League had more than once sent a deputation to Parliament *re* the matter, and asked that a line be speedily opened as far as Bonser's Camp, because of the revenue-producing result. The work proceeded.

Ralph was now too far away to continue the oversight of Crowley Camp Sunday School, and, as Mrs. Crockett decided to move her establishment with the progress of the line to Bonser's Camp, he asked Mr. Nelson to make other arrangements if sufficient scholars were left, and he soon started one at Bonser's Camp. In straightening out some papers one night after his removal he came across the *War Cry* he had bought some time previously at McGirr's Camp, when the officer was round collecting on behalf of the Self-denial Fund. Something suggested that he should look at it. He did so, and his eye caught the headline, "Missing Friends." He read down the column—

" Important.

MESSENGER.—Anyone knowing the whereabouts of a young man named Ralph Messenger, who is supposed to have gone abroad, having left England some years ago, and has not been heard of since. It will be to his advantage to communicate with Headquarters, Salvation Army, Wellington, as soon as possible."

He immediately wrote to the address given, stating he believed he was the man wanted. In a few days he got a reply stating that the firm of John McGregor and Co., Ironfounders, London, were anxious about his whereabouts, as they wished to communicate with him on a very important matter. They had forwarded his address to them.

What did it all mean? What could they wish to communicate?

To get at the bottom of things, we must re-trace our steps to the time when the Rev. Peter Thompson left John McGregor's office. They decided to communicate with the Salvation Army authorities, and it was arranged to advertise in the overseas *War Cry*.

Ralph Messenger was astounded. He wrote to the Salvation Army authorities for information. They could not supply any more, and he could only wait.

Ralph Messenger's mind was considerably agitated over the matter, but Hector Nelson told him to possess his soul in patience.

Ralph had been a different man since that Parliamentary visit. He could not tell how or why, but Edna Stanton, the Prime Minister's niece, had scarcely been out of his mind. There was something in her touch when he had lifted her out of the creek that thrilled his whole being. No one had ever interested him so much before. Was he in love? Was he dreaming, or what? This could never be, and he tried to banish the experience from his mind. But he could not. Was it right that he should?

He was aroused from his thinking by the news that there had been an accident at the tip. One of the men had been run over by a truck, and his leg was badly

crushed. Throwing on his hat and coat he hurried to the scene, and found Dick Congdon had come to grief. He decided to render first aid, and applied a tourniquet and stopped the bleeding, and then had him packed off to the hospital by the ballast train. Accidents do happen, unfortunately, on such works, but the wonder is that there are not more. Dick was laid up for some weeks, lost his leg, and ultimately found his position as a gate-keeper at one of the open railway crossings in another part of the Dominion.

Hector Nelson was doing a good work amongst the workers on the line, and the settlers. There were many homes in which he was specially welcome. It was while visiting one of these friends that he met Grace Mathieson, the daughter of a leading farmer in the district. When he started a service in the locality she was one of the most interested, and consented to help with the singing. It was not long before Grace Mathieson gave evidence that she had chosen the better part. She was a beautiful girl, her hair, long and auburn, fell to her shoulders. Her bright-blue eyes and ruddy cheeks and complexion gave her the appearance of a strong, healthy girl. She possessed a deep, full forehead, and her conversation showed that she possessed rare intelligence, especially when talking of the finer things in life.

As Hector Nelson made her home one of his stopping places, it almost goes without saying that they became friendly, and deeply interested in each other's work and doings. It was a sort of Bethany to Hector Nelson. It is not to be wondered at, nor surprising, that love unfolded under such conditions. When he wanted a new song played, Grace readily consented to accompany him on the piano. Again, the Quarterly Meeting of the Camp Mission was held at their home. Mr. and Mrs. Mathieson were interested in the development of the work, as the quarters went by. In many settlements there were regular services established each Sunday, as well as through the camps. In some a little church had been erected, for Hector Nelson believed in each place having a church home.

He did not believe in a make-shift building as a permanent thing, and had not much sympathy with church services in schools for years and years. Settlers got a home of their own, he argued, and they should at least treat God in the same fashion. He also believed in organising, so that there should be a good foundation, particularly in those places where there was likely to be a good centre. He had a decided objection to missing the opportunity, and then, when another church was on the ground, pushing in.

CHAPTER XXV

CUTTING THE RIBBON

"If you are sighing for a lofty work,
If great ambitions dominate your mind,
Just watch yourself, and see you do not shirk
The common little ways of being kind."

—ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

THE agitation on the part of the Railway League and those interested in railway progress was at length to be rewarded. Word was received from the authorities that the construction work and tunnels up to Bonser's Camp had been passed by the Chief Engineer for the Public Works Department—that the line was safe for passenger traffic, and that it was to be opened as soon as arrangements could be made for the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Works to get away.

At last the following paragraph in the public press caused people to be on the alert—

"It appears to be pretty definitely settled that the Bonser's Camp section of railway will be taken over by the Railway Department on—— There will then be about three-parts completed out of the hundred or so miles connection with the Main Trunk."

The residents of Bonser's Camp were officially notified, and the settlers and workers all combined to make complete arrangements for the day's celebrations. It was decided that the day's proceedings should take the form of a day's monster picnic in the bush, and a conversazione or banquet for everybody at night. The arrangements were complete, and the hall was profusely decorated with bush-foliage, the hall for the occasion being none other than the large goods-shed transformed for the occasion.

Ralph Messenger was the central figure in seeing that all the arrangements were complete. All that was

needed to make the event successful was a fine day. On Ralph's arrival at his residence—for since he had become Engineer he had the honour of being the first occupant of a new house, which was to be afterwards used by the permanent hands, or the Station Master—he went to bed early, to be ready for the great event of the morrow.

The morning dawned beautifully fine. Flags and bunting were stretched from the goods-shed to the railway station. About eleven o'clock the cry was raised "She's coming!" and in a short time the engine drawing the excursion train steamed into the station, amidst the cheers of the large crowd assembled.

The opening ceremony was performed by the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Johnson Backhouse, who cut the blue ribbon stretched across the rails, and declared the line open for passenger traffic. He congratulated the district on at last having the railway completed as far as Bonser's Camp, and thanked the Engineer, Mr. Ralph Messenger, his staff, and the workmen on achieving such a happy state of things. He stated the line had cost about £13,000 per mile. Work was in progress for several miles ahead of Bonser's Camp. When completed right through to the Main Trunk, the line would attract great numbers of tourists to see the magnificent country through which it passed. He was delighted to see grass in abundance everywhere, and glad to learn that the stock were all putting on condition and should winter well. He was also gladdened that the population of the district had more than doubled what it was a year ago. He had learned that, besides butter and cheese, over a thousand bales of wool went out of the district last season, and a good quantity of fat and store steers and sheep. He would like to remind them that it was only a few years ago when all the bush was standing; and it spoke well for the settlers to have done what they had in face of all the drawbacks in such a short time. He would remind them that one of their best assets would be the large and valuable coal deposits, which they could now work at Bonser's Camp, and from which they could supply coal to any

part of the North Island. He did not intend to make a long speech, as he understood they were to have a day's picnic and enjoyment. Such an opportunity did not often present itself to the townspeople.

They were now to have dinner in picnic style in the bush. And after a good time in the bush, and a good look round, during which a ballast engine would take them further along up to "The Front" to see the country beyond, they would return, have afternoon tea, and the excursionists would board the train for home, while the Ministerial party would stay for the evening's banquet, etc.

The assemblage, having given three cheers for the Prime Minister and his party, went into the "bush," where the tables had been erected under the Rimu and Rata trees. Heavily laden, they waited for the hungry guests to lighten them of their burden.

It was a pleasing feature of the proceedings to notice that the Prime Minister was accompanied by his wife and their niece, Miss Edna Stanton, once again. A Committee had been appointed specially to allocate and decide who was to look after the needs of the individual members of the party, and Mr. Messenger found himself specially entrusted with the care of Miss Stanton and Mrs. Backhouse. Someone else claimed the attention of Mrs. Backhouse, and so Miss Stanton came under the immediate attention of Ralph. It was a pleasing task. He remembered her former visit and the accident. He wondered if she remembered?

Yes, Edna Stanton had remembered. She would never forget. She was not the one to lightly forget a kindness, especially so graciously rendered, under such trying conditions. In fact, she had extracted a promise from her aunt that she should accompany her when the section of the railway was opened. She had become so interested in the Railway Construction Camps and the work "At the Front." It was therefore a double pleasure to her to find herself once again under the notice of the clever young Engineer.

If Ralph Messenger had felt a thrill of pleasure on the previous occasion, so had Edna Stanton. No one

had ever interested her so much. The young Engineer seemed so manly, and yet so gentle. They chatted away during the lunch-hour, and found themselves seated together during the ride in the ballast trucks to "The Front." What would be the result of it all? Time would tell.

On arrival as far as the ballast train could take them, Mr. Messenger as Engineer took the lead, and explained to all interested what amount of work had yet to be done, and showed them the working of a big tunnel which was to put them into the great valley beyond; after which there would be little engineering difficulty beyond cuttings for miles. All acknowledged that they had had a most pleasant afternoon, and the return journey on the ballast trucks added to their enjoyment. The steep cliffs on either side of the narrow gorge, with the abundance of evergreen foliage, enhanced the natural beauty of the surroundings.

Afternoon tea was ready on their return, and quickly served. Soon after, the town visitors and excursionists left for their homes, amidst the applause of the settlers and railway workers, who saw them off. The Ministerial party were then conducted to the Boarding House for a rest, before the evening gathering.

The excursion train brought out a mail of letters. Ralph had been too busy to call for his, and, on receiving an English envelope, was intensely interested—

MR. RALPH MESSENGER,
Railway Construction Camps,
North Island, N. Z.

On opening it, he found it contained the crest of John McGregor & Co., and he read the following—

"DEAR SIR,

After all these years it has come to our knowledge that you are innocent of the charges brought against you when you were in our employ.

We have a signed testimony, and duly witnessed in the shape of a confession, from the man who was both guilty of breaking in, setting fire to our property, and forging our name.

There is no question of doubt about your innocence. We should be glad to hear from you, and to know if you would care to join us in the firm, as some slight compensation for the great miscarriage of justice which befell you.

We feel this position keenly, and express our deep regret at ever doubting you. Enclosed please find a signed copy of the confession.

Trusting for an early reply,

Believe us to be,

Regretfully and sincerely yours,

JOHN MCGREGOR & Co.

P.S.—We have inserted a statement, declaring your innocence, in all the leading papers.

J. McG. & Co."

The confession told what we already know. Ralph could scarcely believe the news. At last his character was vindicated! No more would the words "Arrested!" and "Two Years' Probation!" ring in his ears.

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The time for the night meeting arrived, and the goods-shed was jammed to the doors. The chair was taken by Mr. Donald McIvor, Chairman of the County Council, and a leading settler of the district. In opening he stated that the day's proceedings marked a new era in their history. A Railway to their doors! Could they believe it? No more long muddy journeys, but the train to take them to any part of the North Island! He had great pleasure in asking the Prime Minister of the Dominion to address them, who said—

"Mr. Chairman, it indeed affords me much pleasure in being present. My sympathies have ever been with those who do the pioneering, and I am personally glad to spend a little time amongst you. You are indeed marking a new era."

He could only repeat what he had said earlier in the day, that he congratulated the district on its progress. He also pleaded for a more active public spirit, and some

commonsense in pressing on the advancement of the Dominion. He understood the gathering that night was to be of a social nature, and he felt sure long, dry speeches would be out of place. The linking up of this line, when completed, with the Main Trunk would be an important factor in the development of the North Island. He believed that railway construction should be carried on irrespective of party politics, and the best routes should be taken. They should take the recommendation of their experts, who should know best. The courageous settlers who were doing the pioneer work still required to be encouraged and assisted as far as possible, and as far as was in his power he would assist in that direction. There was a vast amount of country to be opened up, and his Government would endeavour to give the settlers facilities for cultivating new land, which, assisted by the railways, would be made reproductive, and the country would quickly develop. That was what the line should do, and it devolved on all to see that this happy consummation was brought about as far as possible. (Applause).

The Prime Minister then resumed his seat.

Musical and other items were then given, after which the Chairman rose, and stated that they had yet a very important item on the programme—in fact, the most important, in his judgment. Some time ago, while the line was progressing, an accident happened in one of the tunnels whereby several men were entombed, and they would doubtless have lost their lives had it not been for the presence of mind and bravery displayed by one man. By his action and pluck they were rescued, and on behalf of the Royal Humane Society of New Zealand he had intense pleasure in asking Mr. Ralph Messenger, the Engineer in charge of the works, to come on the platform.

Mr. Messenger was completely taken by surprise, and was given quite an ovation.

The chairman then asked the Prime Minister of the Dominion to say a few words.

The Hon. Johnson Backhouse stated that it afforded him much pleasure to present, on behalf of the Humane

Society, both a Certificate of Merit and a gold medal. As this was not the first time Mr. Messenger had distinguished himself, he had also additional pleasure on behalf of the English Society, in presenting to Mr. Messenger the King's Order of Merit medal, "For distinguished bravery under exceptional circumstances."

The Dominion was proud of such men, and on behalf of it he congratulated the recipient on the heroism displayed. He would ask Mrs. Backhouse to pin these emblems on Mr. Messenger's breast, and trusted that he would always look upon them with feelings of pleasure and keep them as heirlooms to be handed down to posterity as a reminder to go and do likewise.

Mrs. Backhouse then stepped forward, and while the whole audience cheered and cheered, pinned the emblems of bravery on his breast.

CHAPTER XXVI

TIMOTHY O'GRADY ASSUMES HE IS SOMEBODY

"Is it worth while that we jostle a brother
Bearing his load on the rough road of life?
Is it worth while that we jeer at each other—
In blackness of heart that we war to the knife?
God pity us all in our pitiful strife."

RALPH MESSENGER thanked them for their grateful recognition and kindly words, which were undeserved so far as he was concerned, and stated he had only done his duty, and would do the same thing again if circumstances arose. He felt deeply unconscious of his unworthiness to receive such high tributes, especially from His Majesty the King, and felt that the kind friends who had brought it under his notice had overestimated his action. He was proud to have lived to see this day for another reason; for to-day there had come to him a letter clearing up a mystery which he could not unfathom, and which was the cause of him coming to the Dominion.

He then told the story as we know it. How he was suddenly arrested, tried, and on circumstantial evidence convicted, and how he had served his Two Years of Probation, although he knew he was perfectly innocent, but could not prove it; and to start life again, he had come to this land, and found his way to these works.

"You are all acquainted with my life here," he continued. "Men and women, I value this letter even more than all these medals. Why? Because it clears what is worth more to me than anything else—a good name. A supposed stain upon my name and character has been removed by the confession of the guilty man. As a recompense, and something in the way of restitution, I am offered a partnership in the firm, if I like to take it."

"Stop here!" cried several voices. "We can't do without you."

"I have not yet replied, but that is what I have been offered. I thank you most sincerely for the great honour you have done me, an honour which I feel I do not deserve, having only done my duty."

Never had such a gathering been seen on the Construction Works before. Ralph was about to leave the platform, when a chair was specially provided for him, and he was pleased to take it.

"I am sure it is he!"

A stranger rose in the audience.

"Mr. Chairman."

"Platform! Platform!"

"Mr. Chairman, I would like your permission to say a word or two. My name is Frank Templeton, and Mr. Messenger and I were shipmates—that is, we both came out in the same ship, and we have therefore met before. Just before landing in Wellington I was smitten with sickness. The doctor pronounced it smallpox, and I was shunned as if I had been a leper. I was isolated, and when an attendant was required to nurse me there was a difficulty. Ralph Messenger stepped out, and said, 'Here I am, use me.' We were put together, and on arrival in the harbour we were sent to Soames Island in quarantine. He looked after me as kindly and tenderly as a woman, and when we were liberated—when it was diagnosed smallpox when it was only chickenpox—he stood by me like a man. We parted on the Wellington Wharf, and up to to-night we have not met; but I felt I should like this meeting and district to know that it has got a 'White Man' in it, and that 'White Man' is Ralph Messenger!" Intense enthusiasm greeted Mr. Templeton's announcement.

"I have taken up a section a few miles from here, and came in to the opening of the railway not expecting to meet the man who had nursed me when in a great time of need."

The meeting was now at a white heat of enthusiasm. Frank Templeton greeted Ralph Messenger with great warmth of enthusiasm. What would happen next?

The audience wanted to sing, "For he's a jolly good fellow," but Ralph asked them to sing, if the Rev. Hector Nelson, whom he saw in the audience, would lead it—

"All hail the power of Jesu's name,
Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord of all."

It was a remarkable ending to the Opening of the Railway to Bonser's Camp.

Edna Stanton sat on the platform like one entranced. That Mr. Messenger should save her when she fell into the creek and provide a means whereby she escaped suffering through getting wet, was a noble thing to do; but to risk his life for his fellow-men on so many occasions was grand in the extreme. Her ideal certainly was a high one—

"'Tis only noble to be good."

Mr. Messenger seemed just a facsimile of it.

After the speeches and the presentations and the unexpected developments, refreshments were lavishly handed round. It was while this part was going on that Edna Stanton ventured to express her high appreciation of Ralph's work, and sympathy with him on the experiences through which he had been called to pass.

"I know it is said 'we women' don't understand much about roughing it, but I would like to say personally how much we admire a manly man."

She said she would like to know a little bit more about his experiences. Would he tell her?

"It would take too long," he said.

"Well, will you write them down for the encouragement of others, and let me know more about the Railway Construction camps?"

"By-the-by, I would like you to meet the Rev. Hector Nelson. He is doing a great work in these camps. He is over yonder. I will introduce him to you."

Hector had been very much engaged during the day

looking after the interests of a young lady whom Ralph knew to be Miss Grace Mathieson.

"Mr. Nelson, allow me to introduce you to Miss Stanton, the Prime Minister's niece. She would like to hear about your work in the Railway Construction Camps."

"Certainly!"

Hector gave Edna Stanton a deal of information on the growth of the religious life there, and she was more than ever interested. Incidentally he also gave her a glowing account of Ralph Messenger's influence amongst the men.

The time for closing the day's festivities at last drew near, and the special train was ready to take the Premier and his party back to the town. The crowd followed them to the train, and somehow Edna Stanton and Ralph Messenger were thrown together, as they crossed over to the train. As he assisted her into the carriage, she gave him a hand-grip and sweetly thanked him, and said—

"I shall not readily forget to-day's glorious time, and shall always be interested in your doings."

Cheers were exchanged, and the train disappeared in the darkness. What a day it had been! Ralph Messenger would never forget it. The brilliant opening, the English letter, and what it meant to him—the emblems of having done his duty, all showing that his resolve had not been made in vain.

Then the meeting with Edna Stanton again. But, alas! Could he ever hope to win her? Could she ever be anything else to him? Their stations in life seemed so different. Ralph realised that he had never met anyone who had so charmed him. Yes, Ralph Messenger's strong, manly heart had at last been awakened.

He decided to reply to Messrs. John McGregor & Co., expressing great pleasure at being found innocent of the grave charges for which he had been arrested and convicted. He thanked them for offering him an interest in their firm; but as he had worked his way up, and was now Engineer in charge of a very important piece

of railway construction, he could not therefore avail himself of their generous offer. He was pleased to be cleared of a crime of which he always knew he was innocent.

As Engineer in charge of the works, he had to move camp again, and this time to Flanagan's, about half-way on the remaining length between Bonser's Camp and Overton.

The work proceeded apace, showing some of the men as most interesting characters, who, when drink possessed them, got up to some curious pranks.

Timothy O'Grady was one of these. He was a splendid fellow when sober, but when he took a little drop he could not stop until he became drunk. On these occasions he would assume he was somebody. The liquor had a peculiar way of affecting him. He imagined he was the man in charge, and sacked or dismissed the Engineer, bosses, and everybody else. It was most amusing when Tim went on the bust and got tanked. It was "look-out."

On several occasions Ralph had told him to leave, as he was not wanted, but after one of these bouts he would return very penitently, and asked to be let off this time, and would keep away from the liquor all together. He would be given another chance, and would work like a trojan, as if to make up for his failing and lapse. All the hands liked Tim, and when he recovered they often, in fun, asked him when he was going on the "bust" again. Tim, with a tear in his eye, replied—

"Not for a long time, me bhoys."

Happily for Tim and others, the "Sly-grogger" was successfully hunted off the works, and, in plain English, told to "get." Ralph Messenger, since he became Engineer in charge, told the men straight that he wanted to be their true friend, and as such would not tolerate the "Sly-grog" seller on any account. If one of the workmen adopted this rôle he was immediately cleared out of the works. . . .

It was delightful to run a daily passenger train service to Bonser's Camp. A Station Master was appointed, and placed in charge, he was also made

Postmaster for the settlement, so that they now had a daily mail service, and were able to appreciate their daily paper. Another discussion took place in Parliament, and Members urged that more money be spent, more men put on, and the line completed quicker. Settlers were getting disheartened at having to wait so many years for the line to reach their holdings. Originally, it was to have been through in five years, and it was now nearer a dozen, and the end was not yet. It was described as a Taihoa policy.

Taihoa was claimed by some Members to mean one thing, and some another. One section said it was a Maori verb meaning careful consideration, prudent and wise advancement, careful deliberation, putting on the brake, "chewing things over." It may be used for these reasons, but, in English, the other section said—

"This word just corresponds to our own adverb, by-and-by—postponing indefinitely for any reason, or no reason at all, what may be said or done at once."

It has always meant this, and can never mean anything else, whether applied to the occasional or habitual procrastination of a pikeha, "Maori chief," or honourable Parliamentarian grievously pestered by urgent petitions or requests.

"The railway policy of the country," said Members, "is a Taihoa policy. We want it removed as far as the Stopford-Overton line is concerned."

Pressure was brought to bear upon the Cabinet, and more money was granted, and a promise made that the railway was to be pushed on at all costs. The Engineer-in-Chief had also discovered that it could be shortened by some six miles without affecting the bulk of the settlers. It was pointed out that the advantages of the deviation were considerable, from the Engineer's point of view. In the first place, the deviation would not alter the original route. There was also to be considered the fact that the length of line to be constructed would be shortened by about six and a quarter miles, which would mean a saving of some £70,000. Then there would be the cost for maintenance of this length

for all time, which would be saved, as well as the reduced mileage in haulage.

Mr. Christopher Dobelling, the Member for the district, from his seat in Parliament, under all the circumstances, heartily supported it. The engineers having recommended it, the Minister for Public Works having favoured its adoption, supported by the Member, Mr. Dobelling, pressed Parliament to act immediately. An Amendment to the Railways Authorisation Bill was brought down by Governor's Message, and carried through both Houses of Parliament. From all sides it was agreed that the deviation would be a decided advantage to the general interests of the country.

CHAPTER XXVII

ALL WORK AND NO PLAY MAKES JACK A DULL BOY

"The journey of life has its pleasures and pain,
Its sorrows and griefs to bestow;
You never will travel life's pathway again;
Be merry as onward you go."

RALPH MESSENGER read the account of the discussion in Parliament with interest. More men were put on the works, and on certain portions the work went on night and day. Everything was going with a swing.

Ralph did not forget his promise to Edna Stanton, and wrote to her a full account, as our readers know it, of his experiences. He did not omit his ups and downs, difficulties and trials. In due time he received a graceful letter acknowledging his interesting narrative, depicting his experiences, and stated what pleasure it had given her to read it, and signed—

"One who will always take a deep interest in your welfare and advancement.

EDNA STANTON."

Ralph was deeply touched, and occasionally sent her anything that he thought would be of interest to her, in the shape of specimens that are sometimes discovered on the works as "excavations" are made.

After the opening of the railway to Bonser's Camp, Frank Templeton lost no time renewing his acquaintance with Ralph Messenger. He also showed his appreciation of Ralph's previous conduct. It was noticed that Frank Templeton frequently had business at Bonser's Camp, and that his special business lay in the direction of Crockett's Boarding House. A watcher of his movements might have discovered that he frequently went out for a walk, and in these walks he was not alone, but was accompanied by a young lady, and that young lady was Miss Edith Barlow.

They were frequently together, and Mrs. Crockett began to be afraid that possibly, in the near future, she might lose Edith, as well as a good customer. However, the force of example is great, and what fathers and mothers have done, sons and daughters think they have a perfect right to do. Young men bachelors on the back-country get tired of cooking their own food, and it is right they should. Man was not made to live alone, and when he does so, there is a dislocation of natural usage, and somebody is robbed of companionship and protection, which was never intended.

Frank Templeton determined to work all the harder on his bush section. He did not mind the "going to court," but it was the going back part that he did not relish. It always seemed an awful long journey home, and the "whare" and house seemed to be so much more cheerless; and he could not write, "There is beauty all around when there's love at home," for his love was away from his home.

Hector Nelson continued to do good work in the Construction Camps, and as the work was rapidly approaching completion, he was thinking of applying for a "married man's circuit" at the ensuing Conference. He had won his way into hearts of many "for his work's sake," but into none more securely than that of Grace Mathieson, and some day she hoped to preside over the destiny of a "manse," and share "for better or worse" the "ups and downs" of an itinerant preacher's life.

Imperial Questions were now agitating the country, and the Prime Minister, for health and other reasons, had to pay a visit to England to confer with the various Premiers of the Empire. Mrs. Backhouse and Edna Stanton were to accompany him, so it was reported in the personal column of the *Society News*. There were other reasons why the latter was taken. She had not been in robust health for some time, and the doctors thought a sea voyage would restore her.

Ralph Messenger read this with deep interest, and for some days felt the position keenly. Should he write

to her about a personal matter? She was the Prime Minister's niece, and he—well—only Ralph Messenger—Engineer on the Railway Construction Works. The more he thought about it the more perplexed he became. If he let her go without this personal note, he might regret it all his life. Should he wait until they returned? He had heard of cases where such had been done, and it had been "too late," for someone else had stepped in. He had been reading the life of Benjamin Franklin, and he came across these words: "My rule is to go straight forward in doing what appears to be right, leaving the consequences to Providence." He believed he was right. Yes! He would act, and take the consequences. It would at any rate let her know that he cared for her, and she could then choose accordingly. He wrote and wished her *bon voyage*, and in a manly fashion declared that she was the one he felt would be his inspiration through the coming years. Would she think it over calmly, and, he trusted, favourably? He showed how he wanted her to be his counsellor and guide in many ways. He wanted her to lift him higher in his profession, so that he might be a greater blessing to his fellow-men.

Ralph Messenger waited until the eleventh hour, and at last posted the letter with fear and trembling. It was done! The click of the letter-box announced that it had dropped into the hands of His Majesty's mail men, and all the wealth in the world could not give him back that letter, even if he had wanted it ever so badly. The die was cast! What would be the result?

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In mid-ocean a young lady was pacing the deck of one of the P. & O. Co's splendidly equipped boats. We have seen her before, for it was none other than Edna Stanton, the Prime Minister of New Zealand's niece. So far the voyage had not improved her health. She walked to the side of the vessel, and looked over the wide, expansive main in a listless manner. The sea was as calm as the proverbial mill-pond. There was scarcely a breath of wind, and nothing was heard

except the thud of the engines as they drove the vessel onward and onward, nearer to their destination, and further and further from the land of her adoption.

Edna Stanton was deep in thought. She had received Ralph Messenger's letter just as she was leaving New Zealand, and had only time to open it after they had commenced their journey. She was immensely touched as she read his manly and finely worded declaration of his devotion to her. It seemed to be the climax to their first meeting, when she fell into the creek and was rescued by him. And now he had asked her for the costliest thing she possessed. What should the answer be? Certainly she had never met one before who fascinated and interested her so much, and now he honoured her by asking her to share his life, to spur him on, and to lift him higher—to be his counsellor and guide, and to enable him to be a greater blessing to his fellow-men. To answer rightly was her sincere desire. But what was the right answer to give?

What would her aunt and uncle think and say? She realised that a good, pure man's love was not a thing to be despised or to be lightly refused. How could she tell her aunt about it? She knew they had other plans for her. They had taken her and brought her up and surrounded her with every luxury. Would they place any obstacle in the way?

They were due at Colombo to-morrow, and she intended replying, but could not make up her mind what to do for the best. Her mind was all unsettled and her nerves unstrung; she realised that she was not in a fit state to settle such a momentous question. She would wait until their arrival in England before she spoke to her aunt about it. The weeks slipped quickly by, and they soon caught sight of the shores of the dear Homeland.

The Prime Minister and party were heartily welcomed by the English authorities on their arrival. In due course they were safely ensconced with friends in London, with whom they were to stay during their visit to England.

The Hon. Johnson Backhouse was soon engrossed

in the special business of the Empire, which more than occupied his time. Edna Stanton was therefore much in the company of her aunt. One day Mrs. Backhouse spoke to her husband, and stated she felt considerably concerned about Edna's health. It did not seem to improve. In fact, she seemed to have lost interest in everything. They consulted a specialist, one of the foremost doctors, who prescribed a tonic for her; but still she seemed to make no progress. The doctor questioned Mrs. Backhouse very closely about her, as to how long she had been ailing. He sounded her thoroughly, and stated he could find nothing organically wrong. How did it start? Had she had a shock? She seemed to have something on her mind. If this were removed, in all probability she would recover. He asked the Premier's wife to think. Had she received any bad news? Was she in love? Had she been disappointed in love? Any of these things would be responsible for her illness.

After the doctor's visit Mrs. Backhouse pondered over the doctor's suggestions and questions, but could not fathom the problem. She determined to ask her niece whether she cared for any one in particular? Had she a lover?

Edna realised that the time for confidences had come, and she exclaimed—

"Oh, Auntie! Read this letter."

Her aunt read it, and was too surprised to know what to say. She realised at last what was the matter. The doctor's questions came to her mind.

"Do you love him?" she queried.

"Yes, Auntie," replied Edna, "with all my heart."

"How long has this been going on? How long have you loved him?"

"Ever since I first met him, when we first visited the 'Front' of the Railway Construction Works. He had acted so nobly, and lifted me out of the creek. I feel I have never met anyone that I could care for before, or since. He is such a noble fellow. Can you remember the opening of the line to Bonser's Camp, and the ovation he received that night for his bravery?"

He has not declared his love for me before, because of the position that I hold to Uncle and yourself. I want to do what is right, Auntie, to you both. You have been so kind to me ; but I feel I cannot live much longer without being able to let Mr. Messenger know that I love him as he loves me."

Mrs. Backhouse told the doctor on his next visit she thought she had discovered the cause of her niece's illness and breakdown, and told him what she had discovered. The doctor looked grave and serious, and said—

"If she does not return this love soon, you will lose her. She is in danger of going into a decline, and I would not give much for the chance of saving her life. Her condition is very serious indeed, and the sooner she gets corresponding with this lover of hers the better. It will rouse her, and give her something to occupy her time. Unless there is anything very seriously wrong with the young fellow's character I advise you not to stand in the way. The health of your niece is critical, her affection seems to be reciprocated, and happiness would undoubtedly restore her health."

Mrs. Backhouse informed the Premier in the evening, when he returned from his Conference session. He heartily laughed, and told his wife that Edna might do worse than unite her life with the young Engineer. If his position were good, he would raise no objection. Edna knew her own heart and mind, and he desired only that she should have the happiest life possible. Mrs. Backhouse fully agreed with her husband, and the news that no obstacle would be placed in the way of the young Engineer winning her was announced.

The glad news immediately acted as a tonic to Edna, and in the course of a few days the out-going English mail left, carrying a letter to Ralph Messenger saying that he had won her love, which she gave freely. Her Uncle and Aunt placed no obstacles in the way, and on their return, in a few months' time, they would be pleased to see him at their home in Wellington.

After this Edna's health improved rapidly—she

was a different girl altogether. She delighted to go about with her Aunt, and gathered together anything which she thought would be of interest to send to the one who had stolen her heart away yonder "At the Front," in the Railway Construction Camps of New Zealand. Happily the time passed, and she waited expectantly for a letter from afar. Her Uncle, who was of a jolly, jovial disposition, frequently chaffed her about the absent hero.

The work at the "Front" went on as usual. They were nearing the completion of this great national undertaking, and it was expected to be completed at the end of the year.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOVE FINDS ITS OWN LEVEL

"What conscience, say, is it in thee,
When I a heart had one,
To take away that heart from me,
And to retain thy own?
For shame or pity now incline
To play a loving part;
Either to send me kindly thine,
Or give me back my heart.
Covet not both, but if thou dost
Resolve to part with neither,
Why, yet to show that thou art just,
Take me and mine together!"

—ROBERT HERRICK.

RALPH MESSENGER frequently wondered about the letter that he had written to the Prime Minister's niece, and when the time passed and he got no reply, he began to wish he had never dropped it into the letter box. He had made a fool of himself, and that was the end of it. He forgot that he was only one of many who had done the same thing. Poor Ralph had many uneasy days as a result.

"Why did I act so presumptuously? What an ass I have been? To propose to the niece of the Prime Minister, who scarcely knows me!"

However, faint heart never won fair lady, and his fate was now sealed. He had not only written, but posted the letter. It must be confessed that the letter had cost Ralph many sleepless nights. He wondered what Edna would think. He felt sure he would get a reply, but what?

The English mail arrived in Auckland one morning, in time to catch the through express, so stated the daily paper. Ralph Messenger was now quartered at Saddler's Camp, whither the Royal Mail Coach

ploughed its way through the mud every other day carrying mails and passengers.

Impatiently waiting, Ralph decided to take a stroll to the store for the letters. So after tea he wended his way thither.

"Good-evening, Mr. Messenger. Getting on alright with the works? Soon be completed now, I expect," said the storeman.

"Yes! They are gradually coming to a finishing point," replied Ralph. "Any mail?"

"Yes," answered the store man, handing Ralph his letters.

Ralph scanned the addresses, and spotted one in a lady's hand-writing, bearing the English postmark. Bidding the storekeeper good-night, he retraced his steps to his hut. He was not long in opening it. What was to be his fate?

Yes. It was from Edna Stanton, and he read—

"My Dearest Friend,

Your welcome letter, wishing me *bon voyage*, was handed to me just as I was stepping on the boat. I had intended replying at Colombo, but deferred until we reached London, where I fell ill.

You ask me for the most precious thing I possess—a pure woman's love. I very much appreciate the honour you wish to confer on me, though I feel most unworthy of it—I am so conscious of my faults and failings. I should not, however, be true to myself if I hid my deep affection from you, who have won my heart so completely.

You will be pleased to know that I have the full permission of my Aunt and Uncle to accept your devoted love, which I heartily reciprocate.

Please excuse me from writing just now at length, as I am still very unwell, and a little unnerved as the result of my illness; but I felt that I could not further delay my expression of loyal and fervent love for you.

Shall be so glad to hear of you soon, and am looking forward to seeing you in Wellington on our return.

Believe me to be, with fondest love,

EDNA."

Nothing was said to Edna about the cause of her illness, nor what the doctor had told her Aunt.

"If you wish to keep her in this world, do not place any obstacle in the way of her getting married."

Ralph could scarcely contain himself. Edna had consented to share life with him! Henceforth there would be a double purpose in living.

Ralph Messenger that night knelt long in silent and thankful prayer to God for such a gift—a true woman's pure love.

The months sped by and at last the Imperial Work was completed in England. The Prime Minister and his wife and Edna had visited various places and seen some of the sights in the United Kingdom, and had booked for the return journey.

Edna Stanton's health was completely restored, and as she boarded the steamer once again was more than pleased, as each revolution of the propeller sent her nearer to him whose portrait she had painted on her heart.

The Premier and his secretary were busy getting ready for the opening of the New Zealand Parliament, so their time was fully occupied as they crossed the rolling sea.

"Oh, Auntie," exclaimed Edna. "I feel so bright and joyous. The outlook on life is so different. Everything seems to be clothed with sunshine! How good you and Uncle have been to me! I am sure I have not deserved it. I do not know how to repay you sufficiently for your kindness to me!"

Edna and her Aunt talked over many plans for her future while they were returning. After about six weeks of life on the ocean wave they once more reached the well-known landmark—the lighthouse on Pencarrow at the Wellington Heads. There they were met by the Government steamer, on board of which were members of the Cabinet. They were soon alongside, and once more they gripped the hands of friends. It was a pleasant and much travelled party that reached the Wellington Wharf. Would he be there? Edna wondered. She eagerly scanned the crowd of faces who were there to welcome them back to the Dominion.

"Stand clear for the gangway!" shouted the man in charge.

"Yes! There he is, Auntie!"

Edna Stanton quickly noticed the manly form of Ralph Messenger, who smiled in recognition. He had got away from The Front for the occasion.

They were soon together, and Ralph was asked to join the Premier and his wife in one of the carriages waiting to convey them to the ministerial residence. "Love had found its own level."

Ralph Messenger lost no time in placing on Edna's finger a sparkling engagement-ring, and that night, as he led her in to supper, it sparkled even as brightly as did the joy in her beautiful dark eyes. Ralph had made his greatest conquest; he had won his greatest trophy, and the two were happily content.

After a few days in the Empire City he returned to his duties. Parliament opened while he was down, and in the Governor's Speech it was announced that the important railway that had been under construction for some fifteen years was at last completed, and ready for the Cabinet to fix the date for the opening.

The eventful day arrived, a special train was run to carry the Parliamentary party right through.

What a wonderful thing is the completion of a railway! To many of the back-block settlers, who had endured hardship and privation for years, it was almost like a foretaste of Heaven. They felt that they were no longer shut off from the outer world, and shunned as if they had leprosy; but were brought in touch with civilisation, and the blessings which living in touch bring.

A great deal could be said of the construction itself. Swamps had been drained, creeks diverted, bridges erected, cuttings made, gullies filled in, tunnels pierced through the hills and mountains. And now all was in spick and span order for the twin steel track to be opened. Excursions were run from all parts of the Island, for it was well known that the last "spike" was to be driven by the Prime Minister.

The auspicious day arrived in due course. It was

a period of rejoicing, and it was entered into with a zest that is only understood by those who have lived in isolation for so many years. What a gala day it proved to be! The Right Hon. the Premier, who was received with prolonged applause, said that the day's function was the most pleasing that he had experienced during the whole of his Ministerial career. The linking up of this line saw the completion of one of the greatest pieces of work in railway construction in New Zealand. When they realised the enormous development that had taken place in the Dominion within the last few years it made them feel that the opening of this line was going to be a bigger factor than anything that had yet occurred to assist in that development. If people would take his advice in connection with railway construction, they would put on one side all differences of opinion as regards route, and take that recommended by experts, apart from political considerations, and let the work proceed.

He concluded by a reference to the part the Dominion would play in the building of Empire, and proceeded to drive home the last spike.

This was done amidst cheers and applause, and the Premier declared the line open for public traffic, and trusted the settlers and those living along its route would reap additional reward and success as the result of its construction. On behalf of the Cabinet and Parliament he desired to thank the Engineers and workmen who had constructed it, and trusted they would long live to construct many more such railways throughout the Dominion.

A splendid luncheon was laid in picnic fashion in the adjacent forest to the delight of the townspeople, and full justice was done to the good things provided. Messages of congratulation were received from all parts of the Dominion, and were greeted with much enthusiasm. The city man stated that the establishment of this railway marked an important stage in the commercial life of the cities. For many years the cities had been labouring under a very great handicap in trade, owing to the want of up-to-date transit

facilities, having to carry on trade by means of a pack-horse or the back of a pedlar ; but the linking up and opening of this line did away with these obsolete methods. They were thankful that this " splendid isolation " now ceased to be.

The Premier, in returning thanks to all who had assisted to make the gathering so successful, concluded the proceedings by saying that they must work together to make the Dominion what it ought to be—the noblest, truest, and happiest land on God's earth.

A resolution of appreciation was heartily passed congratulating and eulogising Mr. Ralph Messenger, the Engineer, for the manner in which he had done his work, and for the splendid handling of the men who had constructed the line. Many of the men present said that if they had such men in charge of all undertakings there would be fewer labour troubles. The resolution, and a copy of *Hansard*, were ordered to be sent to Mr. Messenger, containing the remarks of the Members of Parliament upon the subject.

Ralph was glad to receive such a testimonial, and expressed gratitude that he had—at the commencement of his colonial life—found his way to " The Front."

The Parliamentary party returned to their duties in Wellington highly pleased with their visit, and the opening and completion of the new railway.

CHAPTER XXIX

RALPH MESSENGER, LTD.

" Don't let folks discourage you—
Keep a-climbin'.
Keep your goal always in view—
Keep a-climbin'.
If you do right things to-day,
Sometime you'll be makin' hay,
And you'll hear the people say,
' He did some climbin'."

—The Vanguard.

Just as Ralph was finishing up at the Construction Works he received a further communication from John McGregor & Co., stating that Mr. McGregor, Senior, had died, and in his will had left to Ralph Messenger the sum of two thousand pounds, or a partnership in the firm, as some compensation for the wrongful treatment and suffering caused through the sin of others—with a request that he would personally come over and arrange matters with the executors immediately, or as soon as convenient.

Ralph, of course, showed the communication to Edna Stanton.

" What do you intend to do ? " she asked.

" I think I must go home as soon as possible. The only regret I have is leaving you, unless you can go with me."

" Oh, Ralph ! " she exclaimed. " Go with you ? What do you mean ? "

" It can only mean one thing, Edna. You go with me as my wife. I have lived a strenuous life in New Zealand, and feel that I need a holiday. Further, the work I was engaged in is completed, and I can now get away before accepting other important positions."

" But, Ralph, I have only just returned from a

trip abroad ! Then, again, it seems so hurried, does it not ? " queried Edna.

" Yes, it may seem rather sudden ; but circumstances alter cases. We should have our honeymoon, and thus combine business with pleasure. I want to go across the United States of America and Canada, as well as through the United Kingdom and Europe, to study the latest in engineering. What's to hinder you from sharing the enjoyment ? "

" I see," replied Edna, smiling. " That's the way you put it—rather an adroit move. But I really must think it over."

" Suppose we consult your Uncle and Aunt, and lay the position before them ? " urged Ralph.

This was done, and seeing the younger folk so radiantly happy, and finding no valid objection, they agreed to the early marriage of their niece, which would enable them to tour the world together. Arrangements were therefore made for the marriage to take place as early as convenient.

Of course, there was only one Minister capable and good enough for the ceremony, and that was the Bishop, who had largely shared Ralph's joys and sorrows at " The Front." The date was at length agreed upon, and a letter despatched asking the Rev. Hector Nelson if he could officiate. He gladly consented, and on the day selected those immediately interested wended their way to the " Methodist Cathedral " of the Empire City, where, before a crowded assemblage, Ralph Messenger received the best trophy he had ever won, and he and Edna Stanton were made one.

It was only natural that Ralph should have as his " best man " the Secretary of the Y.M.C.A., whose stirring, manly addresses had given him such encouragement when he landed a stranger in Wellington ere he went to " The Front."

Edna expressed a wish, which was readily gratified, that Grace Mathieson, at whose home she had stayed while on one of her visits to " The Front," should be her only bridesmaid, her one condition being that she should bring from the bush at " The Front " suffi-

cient clematis for her wreath and bouquet. The wedding breakfast was tastily served at the Prime Minister's residence, after which they boarded the Main Trunk Express for Auckland, ready to catch the mailboat for Vancouver.

It was a supremely happy couple that left the Auckland wharf and set out on this interesting journey. Needless to say, they had the trip of their lives. They reached the United Kingdom in due time, and straight-way found their way to London, and lost no time in calling on the firm of John McGregor & Co. A tremendous surprise greeted the members of that firm when Ralph produced his card, and made himself known. They could scarcely believe their own eyes. This was the man who had been unjustly arrested and condemned, and whose future had been blasted. Surely, like Joseph, he had been in the pit, but had been lifted out by the hand of Providence, and he stood before them.

"Good-morning, I have called in reference to your letter announcing the death of Mr. McGregor, Senr., and informing me that in his will he had generously left me a partnership in the firm, or the sum of two thousand pounds. I understand that the executors wished me to come over and discuss the matter at my earliest. I might say that, while I fully appreciate the offer of a partnership, my future lies in far-away New Zealand, and it is not my intention to remain in England. I should be glad, therefore, to exercise my option, and should be glad if you would kindly pay into my banking account the two thousand pounds."

This business was arranged, and Ralph was once more conducted through the works, where he had made a start in life, and where his prospects had suddenly been blasted and blighted, just when success seemed within his grasp. It was like a romance.

There were still men in the works whom he remembered. These were all glad to see him again, and though they welcomed him he found he had no desire to remain in England, to work under such conditions. He thanked God that he lived in a new country, untrammelled by

custom, prejudice, and class distinction, where every man who kept himself straight had the chance of reaching the top of the tree. He spoke a few words of encouragement to the men, during which he told them to do what was right at all costs.

It was only natural that Ralph should find out the Rev. Peter Thompson, and express his thanks to him for his kindly help in the days of long ago. Mr. Thompson asked him to speak on the following Sunday evening at the Mission Service, and tell his story and give his experiences. This he consented to do, and a tremendous crowd assembled to hear him.

Ralph was wonderfully sustained, and step by step he told them how he had been helped by God through all his experiences, and He had never failed him.

"Men," he declared "put God first, and you will never regret it. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and let Him direct your paths. I shall never forget, when I was down, coming to this Mission and getting right with God. Through cloud and sunshine He has been with me both temporally and spiritually. Cheer up, men—especially those of you who may be down. Your only ray of hope centres around the Light that radiates from Calvary, if you would get the best out of life, or meet with the highest success. There is no other way."

The address created a great impression, and many that night resolved to enter into partnership with Humanity's best Friend.

Ralph and his wife spent a good deal of time looking at the Social Institutions of the Old Land ere they returned. Sometimes their thoughts wandered to the Land across the seas, and they wondered what changes were taking place there.

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The Methodist Conference had opened its Annual Sessions in the Queen City of the North, in far New Zealand. There were some interesting problems for it to solve, and a large and representative attendance was gathered together. Amongst the number was

Hector Nelson. His work on the Railway Construction had been highly appreciated, and the Conference placed on record its sense of gratitude for the work done, and in the fostering of the work amongst the settlers, as well as laying the foundation for new Circuits to be built upon. The construction work completed, Hector Nelson had notified the authorities that he desired a change, and also a married man's Circuit. In giving reasons for the change, he said in the first place he felt that another man could now take up the work and carry it to a successful issue. And, secondly, that he had come to agree with Scripture, that it is not good for man to live alone; he needed a helpmate. Members of the Conference realised the importance of his request, and decided to favourably consider them; and when the third draft of stations was read he was down for another part of the Dominion.

The Messengers had been away from New Zealand close upon a year, and were beginning to feel a little homesick. They had finished the United Kingdom, and were now crossing Europe, expecting to join the steamer at Aden. They had had a right royal time, and as they stood on the deck of the steamer one evening, Ralph could not help thinking of his first trip through the Suez and his experiences subsequently across the Pacific. They had a good passage to Australia. A few more days, and they would sight, to them, the best country in the world.

They were heartily welcomed home by many friends. Ralph had learnt a great deal during his trip abroad. The money that was left to him, with what he had saved, had considerably improved his status, and he decided to handle some large contracts, which were constantly opening up in the Dominion. He therefore contracted for bridges, tunnels, public works, and other national employment. The fact of his being able to manage men so well, with his practical experience of the work, soon consolidated his position, and when the county councils, or road boards, or the Government, required important work done by contract and Ralph quoted he generally secured it, for it was well

known that he was a good contractor whom they could rely on in every way.

When Hector Nelson returned from the Conference he found many things to attend to ere his removal. Amongst them, he had the pleasure of receiving a special invitation to proceed to Mrs. Crockett's Boarding House at Bonser's Camp without fail on a particular date by command of Mr. Frank Templeton. Since we last saw Frank he had worked hard on his section, so hard that he was now able to conscientiously ask some one to share his home, and make it less lonely. Do you wonder at that someone being Miss Edith Barlow?

They had become thoroughly devoted to each other, and Mrs. Crockett had long since become reconciled to losing a most excellent and faithful assistant.

Ralph Messenger and his wife were invited, and had promised to be present. The wedding was to take place in the little church which had been erected in Bonser's Camp. The old saying, "Happy is the bride that the sun shines on" was happily fulfilled in Edith Barlow's case. It was a perfect day, and the church, prettily decorated by Edith's scholars of the Sunday School, made the scene one of real beauty.

Hector Nelson did his part well, and Ralph Messenger gave the bride away. Ruby Crockett played the "Wedding March" as the bride and bridegroom left the building. A happy company sat down in Mrs. Crockett's Boarding House, to the bountiful breakfast which she had provided for Edith, whom she looked on as a daughter.

Mrs. Crockett never forgot how Ralph Messenger had saved her life, and that of her daughter Ruby, and she took the opportunity of showing her gratitude to his charming wife by the kindest attention.

Hector Nelson rose to toast the health of the bride. He genially remarked that it was advisable not only to take the two bears into the house—bear and forbear—but it was wise to do something else as well. He told of a certain young couple away north who had recently married, and the young bride found her husband rather disagreeable. She thereupon wrote a letter

to a friend, asking what was the best thing to do, with a request that she would quickly reply, as the matter was urgent. Her friend went to the post-office forthwith, and telegraphed—"Feed the brute!" He had not the slightest doubt about that matter, as Mrs. Templeton was, he knew from experience, an exceptionally fine cook. In fact, he was afraid Mr. Templeton might have a number of callers on that account, if for no other.

Ralph Messenger referred to the happy times they had had together in connection with the starting and carrying on of the Sunday School in the Construction Works at Crowley Camp, and how the bride had been the first to volunteer to assist him; she had always been in her place so punctually and regularly. He wished her every happiness in the union that had been consummated that day. Referring to the bridegroom, they had met under peculiar conditions, as described by Mr. Templeton on the day the "ribbon was cut" and the railway opened to Bonser's Camp. He was sure he would make a good husband, and trusted that when he had been married fifty years he would be able to say, like the Lancashire man as he looked at his wife on her Golden Wedding morning, "I'd marry thee again, my lass."

The Rev. Hector Nelson's approaching departure from the district was viewed with feelings of regret. The Railway Construction Camps were now a thing of the past, and spots that had been a hive of industry and throbbing with human life now presented a scene of desolation, the only memento of the past being a few dilapidated frames of tents, and an abundance of empty condensed milk, fruit, or jam tins. The whole reminding one of the uncertainty and frailty of human life. However, before the workers finally left for other parts, the boys from the various camps clubbed together and decided to give a tangible expression of their appreciation of the Bishop's services at the various camps. This testimonial took the form of a gold watch and albert, suitably inscribed, which was handed to him on his last visit to the Crowley Camp Settlement.

The settlers also combined and presented him with a silver tea service.

As he had applied to the Conference for a married man's appointment, it was necessary for him to do his part, and fulfil the conditions. Grace Mathieson was willing, so the Rev. Joseph Challenger was invited to pay his long-promised visit to the district, and perform the ceremony. A fortnight's holiday, and then the Rev. Hector and Mrs. Nelson commenced their ministry in a new Circuit in the south.

Ralph Messenger's business had developed so successfully that it was now known as Ralph Messenger, Ltd., Engineers and Contractors.

CHAPTER XXX

PUBLIC LIFE

" He serves his country best
Who lives pure life and doeth righteous deeds,
And walks straight paths, however others stray,
And leaves his sons, as uttermost bequest,
A stainless record which all men may read :
This is the better way."

RALPH MESSENGER was thorough in all his dealings. Nailed over the entrance to his works was the " Golden Rule "—" As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye unto them likewise." Commercial trading for him was to be conducted on straight lines, or else he would not touch it. There was to be no Sunday trading or slipshod work. His word was his bond, and he did not intend to deviate from it. He gave those who wished to enter his employ to understand that they must uphold the integrity of the firm, and that every individual man was his representative. There was to be no slumming, or shoddy work turned out of their establishment.

It kept Ralph more than busy in supervising the work, and he was frequently away from home attending to the various undertakings on hand. In his wife he found a true helpmate, and their home life was all that could be desired.

Edna Messenger had learnt that much depends upon how a wife helps her husband to succeed. If the home is a happy one and all is going well there, a man is doubly equipped for the duties outside. She was proud of her husband, and he proud of her, so it was mutual happiness.

Ralph wisely insisted that it was a blameworthy mistake to speak as if the whole well-being and religious life of a family depended on the woman. He said, if

ever that happens to be the case, then so much the worse for that family. Fathers do count. They ought to be made to feel that they count. But, allowing that they count, he declared that Mr. Theodore Roosevelt's statement still holds good—

"The mother is the most important person in the community. She is more important than the statesman." And men who realise most clearly their own duty are the readiest to use Whittier's prayer for her—

" Make her hands like the hands of Jesus,
Blessing the little one,
Make her lips like the lips of Mary,
Kissing her blessed Son."

It was essential to his business that his headquarters be in a central position, so Wellington was chosen, as the most suitable centre, and there he commenced to build up a good connection. Their home was pleasantly situated overlooking one of the pretty bays in the harbour. When they established their home, they took God into it, and every morning the family altar was erected ere Ralph left for his business. His morning prayer was—

" Oh, may I be brave to-day,
And may I be kind and true,
And greet all men in a gracious way,
And put good cheer in the things I say,
And love in the deeds I do."

Ralph Messenger never "undertakes," but allows God to undertake for him. Later on there came into their home, like two beautiful sunbeams, two young treasures—a boy and a girl. The father declared that the girl was a second Edna, while the mother proudly asserted that the boy was the very image of his father. They had no difficulty about a name. The boy was called after his father and the Bishop of the Construction Camps—Ralph Hector. While the daughter, who came a period later, was given the name of Edna Rachel, after her mother and the one who placed her hand on Ralph's head and imparted a dying benediction, "in the days

of long ago." Hector and Ray were great playmates, and made the home completely happy.

Their religious life was bound up with Mission Work in the city. Ralph could not forget that it was through a Mission that he was rescued when he was depressed, dazed, and cast down, and under a cloud, falsely accused. It was the Mission singing that broke the tension, and defeated Father Thames from holding his secret. It was through a Mission that he was started anew. But while this was true, he was not crude or narrow; he felt that he could love and assist all who adorn the doctrine of the World's Redeemer.

Social Problems in particular had a fascination for Ralph. The betterment and uplifting of his fellow-men were his constant study. He believed in the equality of the sexes, and held that a woman had her place in the national affairs of the country. That the women won the right to vote in New Zealand without any animosity being shown on the part of the men he was proud of, and felt that the methods of obtaining it in England, shown by the Suffragettes, had thrown the movement back many years. He was sorry for this, because he believed the franchise to women was a noble thing. The more he studied Social Problems, the more he was convinced that the liquor traffic was at the bottom and root of nearly all sorrow and suffering; while he believed in educative work and the support of temperance advocates, yet he felt that it was useless to have the ambulance in the valley, when a fence at the top of the cliff would have saved the disaster. He was much amused with some of the excuses given by those who were hauled before the magistrates for drunkenness. The one told by the President himself to Ralph was highly interesting as well as amusing. The offender was an Irishman, and he signed the pledge when Father Hay was there, but he appeared before the magistrate six days afterwards. The S.M. was surprised, and a little ruffled. But Pat explained—

"'Twas me absent-mindedness, yer Wurshup, an' a habit I have of talkin' wid meself. I sed to meself, 'Pat, come an' have a drink?' 'No,' says I; 'I've

sworn off!' 'Then I'll drink alone,' sed I to meself. 'And I'll wait for yez outside,' sez I. An' when myself came out, bedad, he was drunk!" However, this ingenious excuse did not prevent Pat from being fined ten shillings.

As a business man he could not close his eyes to the fact that the liquor traffic had got a tremendous hold on the community. Surely there was a remedy? Gradually the interest grew upon him, and he was invited to join the New Zealand Alliance for the Total Abolition of the Traffic in the Dominion. His interest developed until he found, outside of business matters, he was devoting a tremendous amount of his time to this particular reform. He visited the No-Licence Districts in connection with his Alliance, and found that although they were frequently misrepresented, yet if people took the trouble to go into these districts, they would find that prosperity was just as great as elsewhere, and that there was far less crime. He was asked to state on the platform what he had seen, and reluctantly consented, and found his effort most thoroughly appreciated, so much so that, like *Oliver Twist*, they ask for more, and before he knew where he was, he became a recognised "No-Licence" platform speaker.

He took great interest in the Y.M.C.A. and its doings, and was ultimately elected President. The Sailors' Home and the work of the sailors were particularly interesting to him, and he did all in his power to make the life of Jack Ashore inviting and attractive. Then the Boy's Institute was inaugurated, and he was asked to identify himself with it. From a commercial standpoint he thought it a desirable institution in the community. Lads were worth saving, for they were a nation's most valuable asset.

The gambling evil, unfortunately, began to loom very prominently before the city, and in their own interests the business men had to take action, and petitions and special sermons were authorised. Justice Tomlinson had made some pertinent comments in relation to the demoralising effect of the existing

gambling laws on the young men of the community. As a result, the whole countryside was aroused.

All the leading business firms appended their names to the following petition, and sent it to the Ministers. Association, asking for their assistance—

"We, the undersigned citizens and employers of labour, respectfully beg to draw your attention to the scathing remarks which Mr. Justice Tomlinson gave utterance to at the Supreme Court when passing sentence on prisoners the other day on the evils of gambling generally, also to his opinion that recent legislation passed by the New Zealand Parliament had produced a very degrading effect upon a certain section of the population of this Dominion. We therefore beg to suggest that special sermons on gambling be preached in all the churches, and that petitions be placed in such buildings for signature, to be forwarded to the Houses of Parliament as early as possible, requesting the revision of recent gambling legislation in the interests of public morality."

The members of the association strongly supported the views expressed by the Judge, and warmly complimented the business men for the interest they were taking in an endeavour to suppress the evils that followed in the train of gambling.

As time went on, a large and representative deputation asked Ralph if he would allow himself to be nominated as Mayor of the city. After a sharp contest he was returned to the position by an overwhelming majority. While he was engaged in public life, his business prospered, and as each department was organised on thoroughly sound lines he could keep his fingers on the whole concern. In all his civic and philanthropic life he was ably supported by his good wife, who was interested in every form of good work.

As Mayor of the city he organised a great drainage scheme. His practical knowledge as an engineer showed him that there was a great need to reduce the death rate and improve the health of the people.

The hospital was at this time full of typhoid fever cases, causing great consternation. What was the cause?

Widespread interest was evoked. Investigation showed that the drainage was defective, and Ralph therefore placed before them a comprehensive scheme which would obviate such outbreaks each year.

A poll was taken on the proposal, and it was carried. The work was put in hand at once, and the streets of the town were soon up-turned with excavations.

Ralph Messenger was pressed to continue in the Mayoral chair for another year until the drainage scheme was completed, and he consented. The work proceeded satisfactorily, with the result that typhoid became almost unknown in the town.

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A Parliamentary Election was about to take place. The Three Years Parliament had nearly expired, and an appeal was to be made to the country. The Electoral Boundary Commissioners had done their duty, and it was discovered that a new Electorate appeared in the North Island. The population all along the new line had increased tremendously. Settlers had simply poured in, and the settlement had grown apace. They were to have the new Electorate. Who shall we ask to represent us? was an urgent question. Enquiries were made, and the reply came: "Ralph Messenger! He knows our needs and requirements."

The Liquor Question had become a burning one, and the country demanded that a gross injustice should be removed, and all votes made of equal value. The determination was manifest that only supporters of the handicap being removed should be returned. The Alliance had got its "back to the wall," and had adopted as its motto, "We will see this thing through!" And its supporters were very expectant. Every Electorate was being contested by one pledged to support its demands. There was no time for rail-sitters and wobblers. Men were required, and stalwart ones at that!

The country seethed in a state of great excitement. The Empire City wanted Ralph Messenger, but he decided to contest the Crowley Camp Electorate. It

was a very wide one, and the time approached for platform work. Ralph was delighted to visit his old haunts. His wife went with him, and they had a right royal reception. As it was popularly said, he knew their needs and requirements.

Polling day drew near, and the district was in the throes of an election. The Prohibitionists, on their side, were sanguine of victory.

It was the night before the battle, and the whole Dominion was seething with suppressed excitement. A tremendous poll was expected. All the people who could pray, had prayed. The last shot was fired, and the darkness of the night only intervened between the battle. Old King Sol roused the workers early. They had a big day before them. The polling booth was opened at nine o'clock in the morning. "Poll early!" was the cry of the "No-Licence" Party. Their advice was taken, and a continual stream of voters registered their votes until the poll was closed.

"Now for the result!" Cabs and motor cars and vehicles had been racing about all the day. Too late! The last straggler had missed the bus!

"Who has won!" Which shall be the first to send in their returns? . . . Shortly after seven o'clock the first came in—Ralph Messenger was leading. Return after return came to hand from the various booths. It was said, "There is no doubt about the result! Ralph Messenger is elected the Member for Crowley Camp!"

The result was received with tremendous applause! The settlers did not forget Ralph's noble deeds on their behalf, and had that day shown it by sending him to Parliament as their Member!

CHAPTER XXXI

A MINISTER OF THE CROWN

"Whatever obstacles control,
Thine hour will come; go on, true soul,
Thou'lt win the prize, thou'lt reach the goal."

—CHARLES MACKAY.

It was a tremendous fight, but the "No-Licence" Party scored a magnificent victory right through the Dominion. They swept the polls right through the country. Candidates who were opposed to Temperance Reform went under like the fall of ninepins! For the first time for many years the Temperance Party were in power.

At four successive polls the people had said, by a substantial and increasing majority, that the open liquor bar was not wanted, and, at the last, they had said by over fifty thousand of a majority that the liquor traffic must go out of the country—gun, stock, and barrel! Yet the minority gleefully said, "We've won!" Such a state of things could not much longer be tolerated in a democratic country, and the din of battle was immediately scented. Parliamentary champions loudly declared years ago in favour of Democracy, and one vote one value, but as regards the liquor traffic it, by a side wind, said the minority, and not the majority, shall rule.

Public indignation became so great that the "No-Licence" Party adopted this pledge—

"I hereby give my pledge that, regardless of Party, I will not at the next election vote for any candidate for Parliament who will not undertake, if elected, to do his utmost to secure the complete removal of any handicap on No-Licence or National Prohibition issues, and also the shortening of the period before National Prohibition becomes effective to one year after the carrying of that issue."

It was felt that such a pledge would separate the sheep from the goats. It was also felt that New Zealand owed a duty to Australia, to Canada, and to the Empire generally. It was felt that it was high time they had a House of Parliament elected of which the majority was composed of men who were not shufflers, or half-and-half, on this great moral question. Righteous indignation said, "It must be a majority rule, and not a minority, and no man should be sent to the House who refused such a basis." Such were the plans in the minds of thousands before the Election, and now the Dominion had spoken, and spoken grandly.

At last the Liquor Traffic was doomed, and they were to have a clean nation, and remain a British people, no longer surrendering the right to the majority rule. The Dominion had awakened to the fact that there was no other way of settling any question until it was settled right. What a time of rejoicing swept through the land! The Doxology was sung again and again by thousands of throats, and thanksgiving services were held everywhere.

Never had there been such a victory for righteousness! A new party was returned to power to carry out the people's demand.

The new Parliament was prorogued for June. The Governor sent for the Hon. Gilbert Ferguson, and asked him to undertake the formation of a new Ministry. In a few days Mr. Ferguson had completed his task, and announced his Ministry, and amongst the names published was that of Ralph Messenger, the Member for Crowley Camp, who was not only given a seat in the Cabinet, but made Minister for Public Works. The newspapers of the Dominion were delighted, and nearly all applauded this appointment. Amongst other things said, they predicted that the Hon. Ralph Messenger—if his past record stood for anything—would probably prove himself to be one of the best Ministers of the Crown that the country could possibly have.

The time for opening the Parliament drew near. It was known that the Ministry possessed the confidence of the people, and some important legislation was

expected. The Governor's Speech gave a forecast of what the Party intended to do.

A record crowd assembled at the opening. The debate on the address in reply was completed, and the House settled down to business. The first measure to be introduced was the Licensing Electoral Act Amendment Bill, giving every vote equal value, in this and all Elections. Also stating that the period before National Prohibition becomes effective to be one year after the carrying of that issue.

The Hon. Ralph Messenger was deputed by the Party to take charge of this measure. When he rose in the House to move its Third Reading there was not an absent Member. The visitors' gallery was full to overflowing. The subdued feeling of excitement was intense, and, as he proceeded, his words of burning eloquence seemed to sway the House.

"Gentlemen, it is time this iniquitous clause on our statute book be removed. It has been a blot on justice and righteousness ever since it was placed there. Such a handicap ought to be on the Liquor side, if any handicap is needed. Gentlemen, let us be fair. Majorities must rule, and not minorities. It is intolerable that five Temperance votes should count as two. Think of it! This anomaly must cease. I have great pleasure in moving the Third Reading of this important measure."

When Mr. Messenger resumed his seat, Members rose all over the House and cheered.

Cries of "Vote! Vote! Vote!" were heard from all parts.

"Does anyone else wish to speak on this measure?" asked the Hon. Speaker.

Cries of "NO!" greeted this question, and voices: "We're sent here to put it through!"

"Are you ready to vote?"

The tellers were busy, and the House divided.

The voting was tremendous, and it was announced that the Bill had gone through the House with an overwhelming majority. Never had such a vote been taken before.

It was then passed on to the Legislative Council. How would they treat it? The public had not long to wait, for the Legislative Councillors, realising that the country was in earnest, passed it through, declaring that the Liquor Traffic had hindered the progress of the Dominion long enough, and must no longer stand in the way of other reforms.

As the Dominion demanded it, and as it had waited so long and sent them into power for a special purpose, and seeing the Trade had been given so many years' notice, and, further, seeing that it had only carried on because of the unjust handicap that a previous Parliament had enacted, a Bill was put through, authorising a special vote of the people, to be taken immediately the rolls could be completed.

The evil was intolerable, therefore "Stop it at once, and save the people!" was the cry. This was done, and by the overwhelming vote of the people, after a struggle of some twenty-five years or more, New Zealand was freed from the thralldom of the liquor traffic. Never was there such rejoicing in the land, and it was evident to all that Christian people could, if they wished, root out other great crying evils.

The Hon. Ralph Messenger proved himself to be an ideal Member for Crowley Camp Electorate. He was intensely interested in everything that made for progress in the district which he represented in Parliament—roads and bridges, and the development of the back-country, as well as the comfort and well-being of his constituents. His earnest advocacy soon won for him the name of the Minister for Roads and Bridges. Although both his business and Parliamentary duties made it imperative that he resided in the Empire City, yet he and his wife were frequent visitors to his Electorate, which he claimed was the best in New Zealand.

Frank Templeton kept him in touch with nearly all the developments that were taking place. He could never forget the deep debt of gratitude that he owed to the man who had stood alongside of him when he was shunned as if he were a leper. During the passing of time Frank had prospered. His wife had proved

herself to be a tremendous help to him. He was now a Member and had been elected Chairman of the newly-constituted County Council, which had control of the roads in Crowley Camp Electorate. Great developments were taking place in this district. An English company was introducing capital to develop the large coal seams in the locality, and Crowley Camp was destined to be one of the most prosperous areas in the Dominion. Hundreds of men were entering the district to establish and work the coalfields. The opening of the railway had been a godsend, for it could now carry to all the towns of importance in the North Island, whilst a deep-sea harbour enabled the ocean-going steamers to not only use it for steaming purposes, but to transport it to all parts of the world. The naval authorities took large quantities for use in their ships, and the Company was under a bond to supply them solely in time of war.

The opening up of this industry proved to be an immense advantage to this district, and what was formerly considered to be valueless land, and waste, and almost worse than waste, had been turned to good account. The pioneer settlers were now reaping to fuller advantage the fruit of their arduous and sometimes almost unendurable hardships, and the privations of the days of yore, when they had to travel through seas of mud. They never forgot those experiences, and the days at "The Front" ere the advent of the railway made their life easier; and when they received some compensation for their isolation and relief from the almost indescribable strain.

The name of Ralph Messenger was written in indelible letters on their hearts. His work at "The Front"—his pluck, his manly character and heroism, had acted as an incentive, and they were delighted to have him as their representative in Parliament. They enjoyed nothing better than for a stranger to drop in and spend the night with them, and seated by a blazing wood fire toasting their feet, they would tell the story of Ralph Messenger as we know it.

As a Minister of the Crown Ralph's duties took him

into all parts of the Dominion. His practical knowledge of the needs of a fast-developing country enabled the people to have no difficulty in approaching him whenever he visited their locality. He always lent a sympathetic ear, and, if it lay in his power, he did his utmost to grant relief. The country realised that it was exceedingly fortunate in possessing such a practical man as Ralph Messenger, and he was recognised as one of the strong men of the Ministry. Not only did he possess a good grip of his own department, but he was most intensely interested in all matters for the relief of the distressed throughout. He believed that when he stepped out of Peter Thompson's Mission on that memorable night he was saved for service. Experience had taught him that a primary qualification for serving God with any amount of success, and for doing God's work well and triumphantly, is a sense of one's own weakness. When God's warrior marches forth to battle, strong in his own might, when he boasts, "I know that I shall conquer, my own right arm and my conquering sword shall get unto me the victory!" defeat is not far distant.

Ralph said: "God would not go forth with the man who marched in his own strength. He who reckoned on victory thus, has reckoned wrongly, for it is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. They who go forth to fight, boasting of their prowess, shall return with their gay banners trailed in the dust, and their armour stained with disgrace. Those who serve God must serve Him in His own way, and in His strength, or He will never accept their service. That which man doth unaided by Divine strength God can never own. God will have no strength used in His battles but the strength which He Himself imparts."

He saw more than ever that his casting down, when success seemed within his grasp at John McGregor and Co.'s, had been overruled for good. It had been but the making ready for his lifting up. Life to him had been shrouded in mystery, but, led by God, step by step, He had led him by a way that he knew not. As a

Minister of the Crown he felt the position held was one he was placed in for service, just as when he was a navvy at "The Front," on the Construction Works, only that it brought greater responsibility ; but He Who had His eye upon the sparrow, and Who had cared for him in the past would help him to witness aright, although he had been called up higher.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE STEPS OF A GOOD MAN

"God chooses His great leaders in the world,
And from the rest He asks but willing hands,
As mighty mountains into place are hurled,
While patient tides may slowly shape the sands."

—ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

THE life of a Cabinet Minister proved a strenuous one to Ralph, and particularly so when there was added to it the task of being a Reformer, for this meant constant demands for his services and time from all quarters. Sometimes he met with some quaint and thrilling experiences. Both on the platform and on private occasions he was a welcome visitor throughout the land. What a remarkable life his had been! His disappointment in early manhood had been overruled for good, and made His appointment. Crushed down, he had been driven by a course of circumstances to strike out for himself. Truly, "God moves in a mysterious way." Yet all along, even in the darkest hour, there was the Light of Truth to lead and guide him. Sometimes it was only a gleam, but yet it was there, and he was thankful that he had followed that Gleam. Mysterious! Yet wonderful!

When he was down, crushed by wrongful accusation, and in despair, it was Peter Thompson's Mission Band, with their singing, that had attracted his attention, and struck chords that vibrated once again. On board the ship, far from land, when everything and everybody seemed out of touch, and everything was just the opposite of being cheerful, God put it into the hearts of Harry Champness, Jacob Chambers, and John Stubberfield to hold services on the deck of the vessel, and their singing had again and again inspired courage when otherwise he was dreary and despondent. He

should never forget how the Light appeared again on his arrival, a lonely stranger, ashore in a strange land, when the advertisement inviting strangers to the Y.M.C.A. came into his hands, and the subject, "Your next Move," was delivered by the National Secretary. The Light appeared again in the good woman who drove through all weathers to Fiddler's Camp and started the little Sunday School. It was only a sunbeam, but it had its effect ; it was not lost, and she will be remembered as the woman who did what she could. It was kindled again when Mrs. Crockett and Ruby were snatched from the fire, and he was called "the Christian." Again it came as a little candle, and the little Sunday School at Crowley Camp was the result.

The Light appeared once more in his life in the little shabby Primitive Methodist Church by the roadside that Sunday morning, and in the subsequent visit of Hector Nelson to the camp. It was further developed when he was appointed to the Saddle Bag Mission and Construction Camps, and, finally, in the visit of Harry Champness and Jacob Chambers.

God had used many lamplighters ! How many it was almost impossible to say. Some were like candles ! Some were like lamps ! Some were like lighthouses ! But they all had their place in the Divine plan, and Ralph Messenger looked back and saw how the Shining of the Light on the part of some of God's humble servants had been the means of keeping his feet on the right track. Truly God had blazed a pathway through the forest for him. One night, in reviewing the past, he recalled how he had landed on the Wharf at Wellington, a lonely stranger in the Dominion. He thought of those who had kept the Light of Truth burning at the various stages of his career, through all his ups and downs. He would like to know what had become of them all ?

He made enquiries, and discovered that Harry Champness and Jacob Chambers were still hale and well. They had settled on farms in the Taranaki Province, and after a hard struggle, like many more, they had weathered the storm, and had reached that

stage in life when they could take it a little easier if they chose to do so. On Sundays they took a great number of preaching appointments, doing more work than many of the younger men. Jacob, on being asked how he felt, exclaimed—

"I feel as young as ever I did!"

They are pillars in their Church, and loved by the whole countryside. They had got the real thing and they lived it!

They are glad they crossed the water, notwithstanding all the evils that their English friends predicted would come upon them, which happily have not been fulfilled. They intend to live and die in New Zealand, for they say there is not a finer and better place on God's earth. It has been to them God's own country.

John Stubberfield has a large mercantile business in Auckland, and still preaches the Gospel in halls where seats are free, and no collection is made, and there is every indication that he means to receive the "Well done" from the Master at the setting of the sun. The lady who kept the little Sunday School at Fiddler's Camp has removed to another part of the Dominion, where she is described as one of the elect ladies of the Circuit. Edith Barlow, who with Ralph started the Sunday School in Mrs. Crockett's Boarding House, is well known as Mrs. Frank Templeton, and her husband declares she is the best wife in the world. Mrs. Crockett still dispenses hospitality, and Dame Rumour whispers she may yet once again change her name.

Hector Nelson, the Bishop of the Construction Camps, and his wife are doing well in one of the city Circuits, and he tells the Lady-President of the manse that he never regrets being sent to the Saddle Bag Mission, for there his life was made complete by the entering in of Grace Mathieson; while she in return retaliates by declaring that the love is mutual, for her life becomes happier as the years roll by.

Mr. Glasson, the Engineer who proved a true friend to Ralph, has earned for himself a high degree, and he

is now Chief Engineer for the Public Works Department.

The Hon. Johnson Backhouse became High Commissioner for New Zealand in London on a change of Government, where, with his wife, he worthily represents the Britain of the South. Their hearts, however, are in the Far-off Islands, and they hope in the future to return and spend their declining years until they are carried beyond that bourne whence no man returns.

The Rev. Joseph Challenger is still living, though now a Supernumerary Minister. He has served his Church and people well in the different parts of the Dominion. He has never spared himself, and reaps his reward in the knowledge that he has won the love and esteem of all the Circuits wherein he has laboured. His step is not now so elastic, nor his frame so erect. His hair, once black, is now silvery grey; but in other respects he is hale and hearty, and whenever the call for promotion to Higher Service comes, he is ready to enter therein.

Ruby Crockett is a good lady-help to Mrs. Nelson, and is developing into a fine character, ready for the grandest position any true, good woman can enter. It is not likely that she will knowingly value herself lightly, as her ideals on life partnerships are too high for such a catastrophe as that. Ruby only smiles when it is suggested that she is too good to throw herself away, and replies—

"There is not much likelihood of that happening!"

The Hon. Ralph Messenger's services are more than ever sought after, and he is beginning to feel the strain. His medical man advises him that he must go slow, or he will not be answerable for the consequences. So, after spending a great many years in the capacity of Member for Crowley Camp and Minister for Public Works, and a Minister of the Crown, during which he gave himself unsparingly to all parts of the Dominion, he decided to retire and spend the eventide of his life in less onerous work, but not less important—of improving the town in which he lives. He feels that he can do anything for the good of the people, and places

his services freely at the disposal of his townsmen. His family are all respected, and much loved for their father's sake, and they are making a name for themselves.

When it was announced that the Hon. Ralph Messenger intended to retire from active political life and Parliament the news was received with deep regret "from the North Cape to the Bluff." Newspapers and others eulogised his magnificent services to the country, and stated that a national testimonial should be organised and presented to him. Crowley Camp Electorate, which he represented for so many years, and where he was so much loved, was deeply distressed at the prospect of losing so good a Member and such a true friend. They decided to commemorate his services to them and the Dominion by erecting a life-sized statue of him. The suggestion was heartily taken up, and contributions poured in.

The meeting declared that it did not believe in stating how good a man had been when they were taking him to the cemetery.

"Besides, Ralph Messenger is one of ourselves," they declared. "By dint of sheer pluck and industry he had made his way, and yet he never got too big for his boots. He never looked down on any one of us, but has always been ready to lend a helping hand; and if a fellow has been down, Ralph Messenger has tried to lift him up again."

It is a truism that "Days are not to be esteemed after the number of them, but after their goodness." Ralph's heroic deeds, bravery, and self-sacrifice would never be forgotten. Parents told their children and their children's children. The Government stated that the loss of his services to the country were irreparable. So that they would still be privileged to enjoy some measure of benefit from his wide experience, they called him to the Legislative Council, where he would be able to take things a little easier.

Ralph was much touched at the expressions given utterance to by his fellow Parliamentarians, and rejoiced that they had had so many pleasant and, he trusted,

profitable times together. He would be very pleased to accede to the wishes of his colleagues and take a seat in the Legislative Council. He hoped now the session was over to take a trip to the Islands of the Pacific, for his health and other reasons, and trusted to return more than strengthened to finish serving his day and generation. He felt it was a grand thing to live. Life opened up such a grand vista of opportunities. Ere the session closed the Members of both Houses assembled in Bellamy's, and entertained the Hon. Ralph Messenger at a parting banquet, and presented him with a portrait of himself in oils, which they trusted would be handed down through the family as an heirloom, showing what can be accomplished by steering a straight course.

Ralph and his wife and family left for a long holiday in the Islands. It was a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

Standing on one of the lovely spots at Samoa, near the late residence of Robert Louis Stevenson, Ralph turned to his son and daughter, and said—

"It is impossible to comprehend what God can do through a man or woman who is fully consecrated to doing the best for Humanity. In the words of General Booth, he said: 'Do the right, though the heavens fall.'"

Then, turning to their mother and his devoted wife, he said—

"Wife! A man is wonderfully fortunate when he secures such a helpmate as you have been to me. My greatest wish is that our children may have the same joy and happiness that we have experienced. The best life is that which is full of love—for true love is selfless—self-forgetfulness. Here and now, on this beautiful spot, near the resting-place of one who has written his name in the literary world, I desire that we all humbly thank the All-wise Providence for what we are and for where we are"; and kissing his wife and the children he vowed once again that he would live worthy of the name of the Man of Galilee.

On their return to New Zealand greetings were

extended from all parts, and a special one from Crowley Camp, stating that they required the presence of Ralph, his wife, and family at the unveiling of the Monument to commemorate his connection with them. They were to be sure and come. So once more they left the Empire City for the spot which meant so much to them. The scene was indescribable. People were there from all parts of the Dominion. Flags and bunting were flying everywhere.. Bands of music discoursed sweet melodies, and enlivened the proceedings. A huge platform was erected, and upon this the leaders had taken their places.

In a few words, Mr. Frank Templeton, who was Chairman, called upon the Governor to unveil the monument to the memory of one of the "whitest" men that the Dominion had ever known.

Lord Stapleton pulled the cord and uncovered to their gaze. They beheld a splendid facsimile of the Hon. Ralph Messenger, bearing the following inscription—

Erected in gratitude, and in memory of
the faithful services of the HON. RALPH
MESSENGER rendered to Crowley Camp
Electorate, and to the Dominion.

He came to this land in his youth, started
on the Railway Construction at "The Front,"
rose to be Engineer-in-Charge, M.P. for this
district, Minister of the Crown.

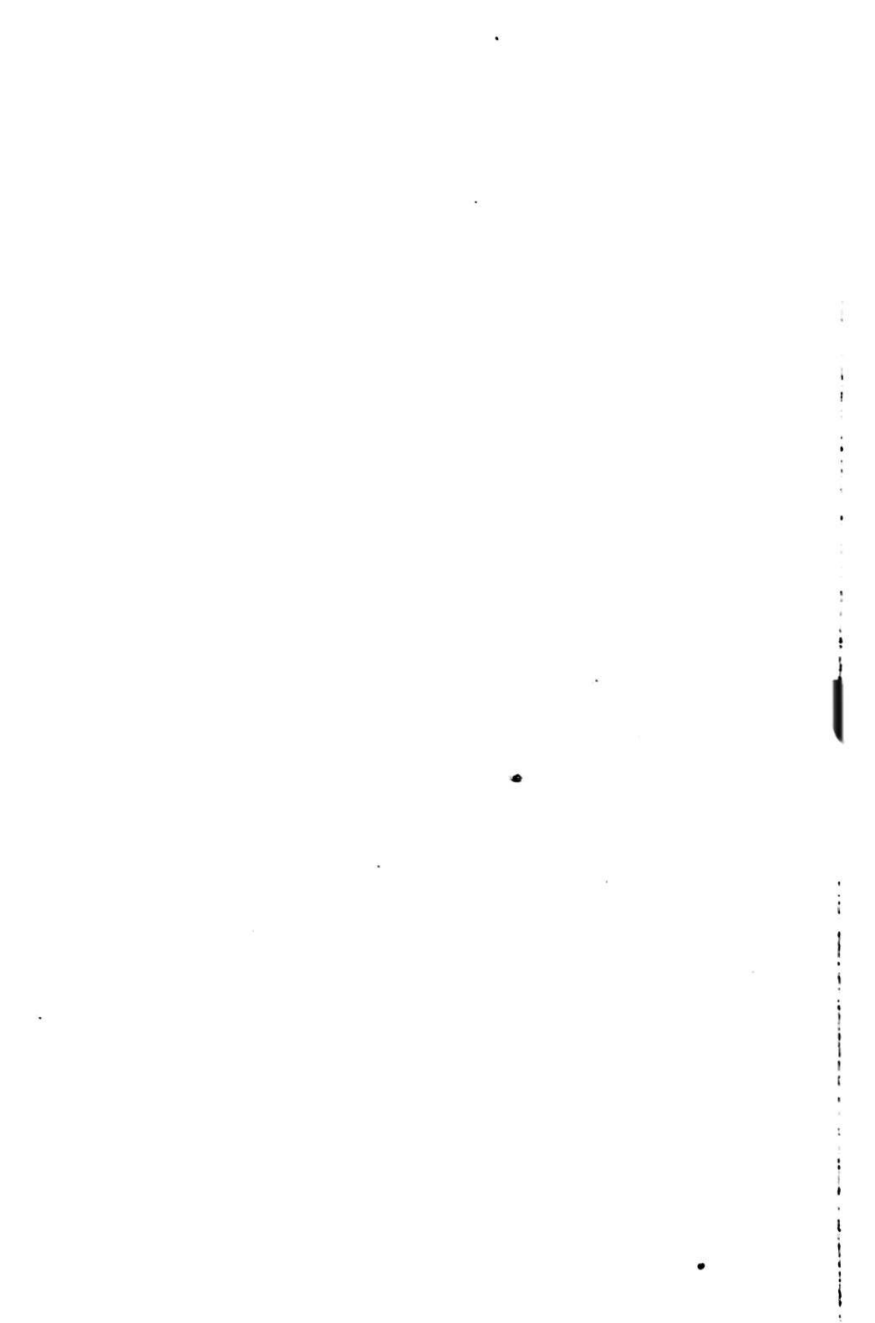
"To live in the hearts of those we love, is not to die."

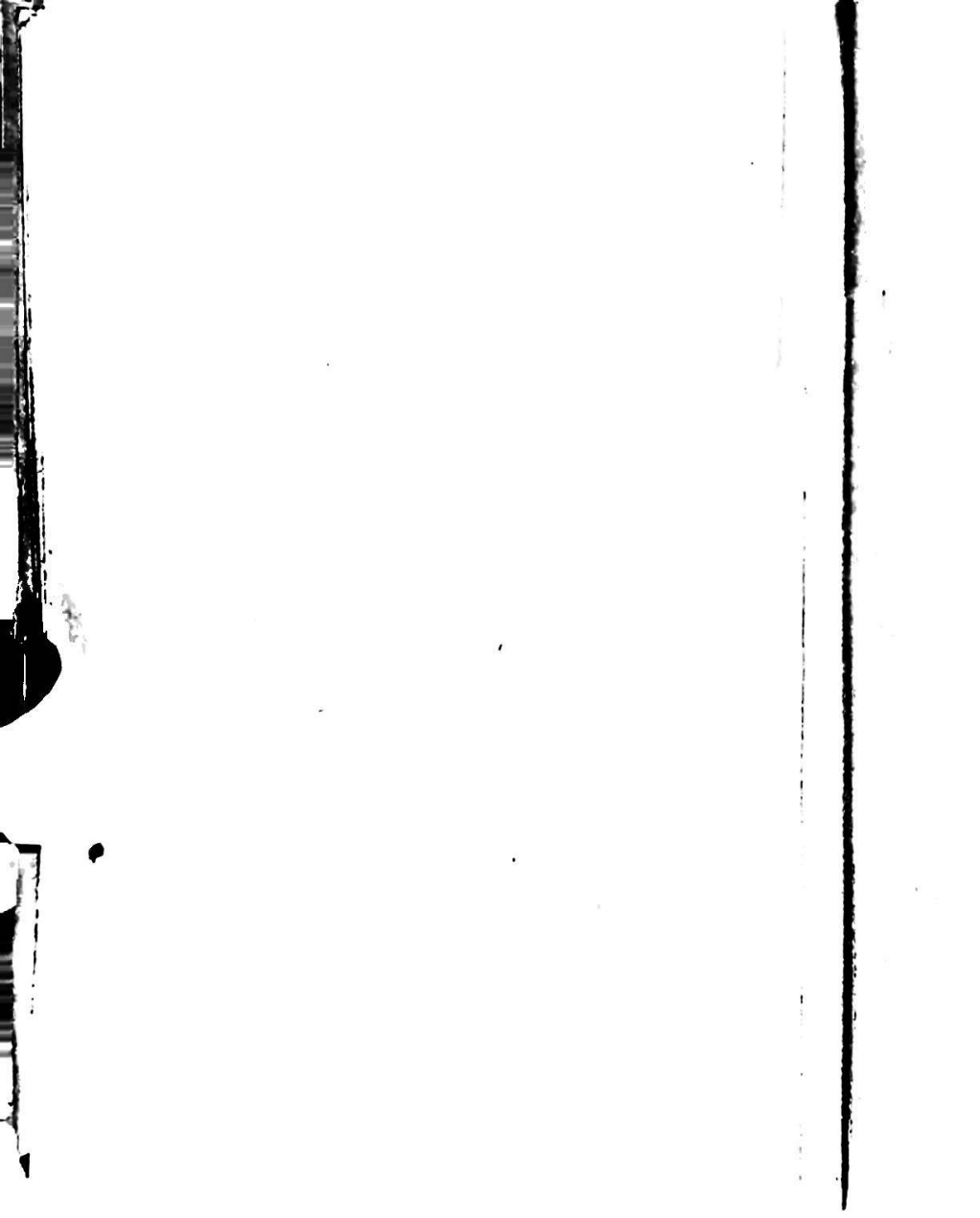
Ralph Messenger then briefly thanked them, and told his life story as we know it, and finished by declaring the highest testimony that he could give was this—

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord."

THE END.









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