



CHRISTMAS CHAPTER 4

A LONG, I might say a painful, pause followed.

The fire burned lower. The weary traveller's voice was silent, when, strange to say – although everybody knows what strange things do happen in dreams – the young man seemed to fade away from sight, and, curiously enough, I found myself in his place. But, what was stranger still, I seemed to have been in his place all the time.

Now I thought that it was I who was the owner of the mansion. It was I who sat by the fireplace gazing on the stranger. It was my heart that had been pierced and torn by the words that he had spoken; and it was my mind that had been occupied with no uncertain notions as to what might be done to deal with the harrowing circumstances that the stranger had so graphically described.

For a time, as I have said, all was silent. It was growing late, and the visitor made no signs of retiring, and I wondered why he did not. It would have been an unspeakable relief to me to have been left alone. I wanted time to consider. I felt I must do something. But what must it be?

I looked at my watch, and thinking I saw the stranger shiver, I stirred up the fire; on which the flames blazed out, the light falling with full glow upon his face. And what a face was then revealed to me! It fairly startled me again, it seemed so familiar. Was it my imagination only? No! I must have seen that face before.

He lifted up his hand. Again, was it my imagination that was playing with me? But there was certainly a wound upon it, and the dim light revealed to me something that seemed to look like blood. Had he met with an accident? What did it mean? It was all so strange; and yet I did not ask him to explain. I simply wondered and wondered who my visitor could be.

I waited. The stranger spoke again: "Can you not hear the wailing of the poor doomed



The
William Booth
Collection

VISIONS

children?" said he; "doomed, not by God, but by selfish, thoughtless man. Can you not hear their sobs and cries, as their little feet are unwittingly turned into the thorny road of evil?"

"Can you not hear the clanking of the chains of the slaves; the groans of the wounded and the dying on the battlefields? Can you not hear the moans of the paupers in the workhouse prisons?"

"Can you not hear the curses and blasphemies which, like an infernal chorus, are going up to Heaven from these blasted hearts and lives all the time?"

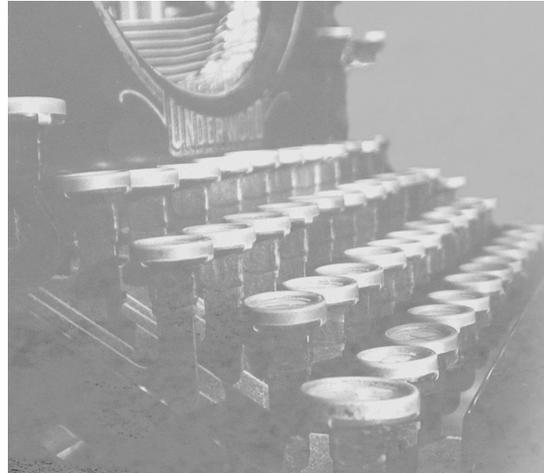
"Can you not hear the despairing cries of men and women perishing in their sins? Can you not hear?" And as he spoke, he raised himself up with the anguish that evidently filled his heart. "Can you not hear the sounds of the weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, of the men and women who have gone down to Hell, because no man cared for their souls?"

As he pronounced the word "Hell" a shudder went through me, and I cried out in bitterness: "Something must be done; someone must go. Men and women cannot be left to perish without a hand being stretched out to deliver them. Who – who – who – will go?"

All at once the stranger rose, crossed over the crimson carpet to the spot on which I stood, and fixed his eyes full on me. Beneath that gaze I trembled from head to foot. And then, in louder tones than heretofore, he spoke again. This time he only uttered two words, but they went to my inmost soul. All through the night, again and again, my heart had been beating so wildly that at times it seemed as though it would force its way through my breast; but those two words made it stand still. What were those words? – "Go YOURSELF!"

"Go myself? What – me go?" I said in astonishment. "How could I go? and whatever use should I be if I went?"

"Me go? Impossible!" I inwardly gasped. It was only the whisper of my heart; but the



The
William Booth
Collection

VISIONS

stranger seemed to hear my thoughts, for, soft and low, he answered back, "All things are possible."

However, I went on, as though he had not spoken, saying to myself, "What, leave my father and mother?" And I thought of their grey hairs, of all their love, and my obligations to them. "Impossible!"

And again the stranger whispered, "All things are possible."

"What! leave my home! with all its luxuries and comforts and associations?" I inwardly kept on saying. And rapidly my mind travelled from room to room, upstairs and downstairs, and then out into the garden; and again I said within myself, "Impossible."

And once more the stranger whispered, "All things are possible."

Then I thought of the breaking up of my plans for the future – my plans for acquiring wealth, and winning fame, and finding pleasure; and again I inwardly exclaimed, "Impossible! it cannot be."

While once more the stranger, in his low, clear, piercing tones, answered, "All things are possible."

And then my feelings got the better of me, and I said aloud, "It cannot be. No one has ever been asked to make such a sacrifice before. No one has ever been expected to leave so much, and go down so low – even for so great an object."

While I spoke another change came over my vision. The luxurious apartment, with its gildings, and furnishings, and comforts, suddenly assumed the appearance of a stable. Here were cattle; there were rough servants; there were weary peasants preparing to pass the night upon the straw, and there was a manger, and in the manger was a lovely Babe. So fascinating was it that it fairly captivated me, and made me forget the stable and its tenants, and all else besides.

As I gazed upon the Babe I could not help fancying that I saw something in the



features with which I was familiar. But while I wondered and wondered, the scene changed once more, and the stable was gone, and the mansion had come back. Once more I was in the drawing room, again the visitor was sitting in his chair, with his face turned fully upon me, as though still waiting for my answer; and as I looked at him more closely, and, to my further amazement, I beheld in him the features of the Heavenly Child.