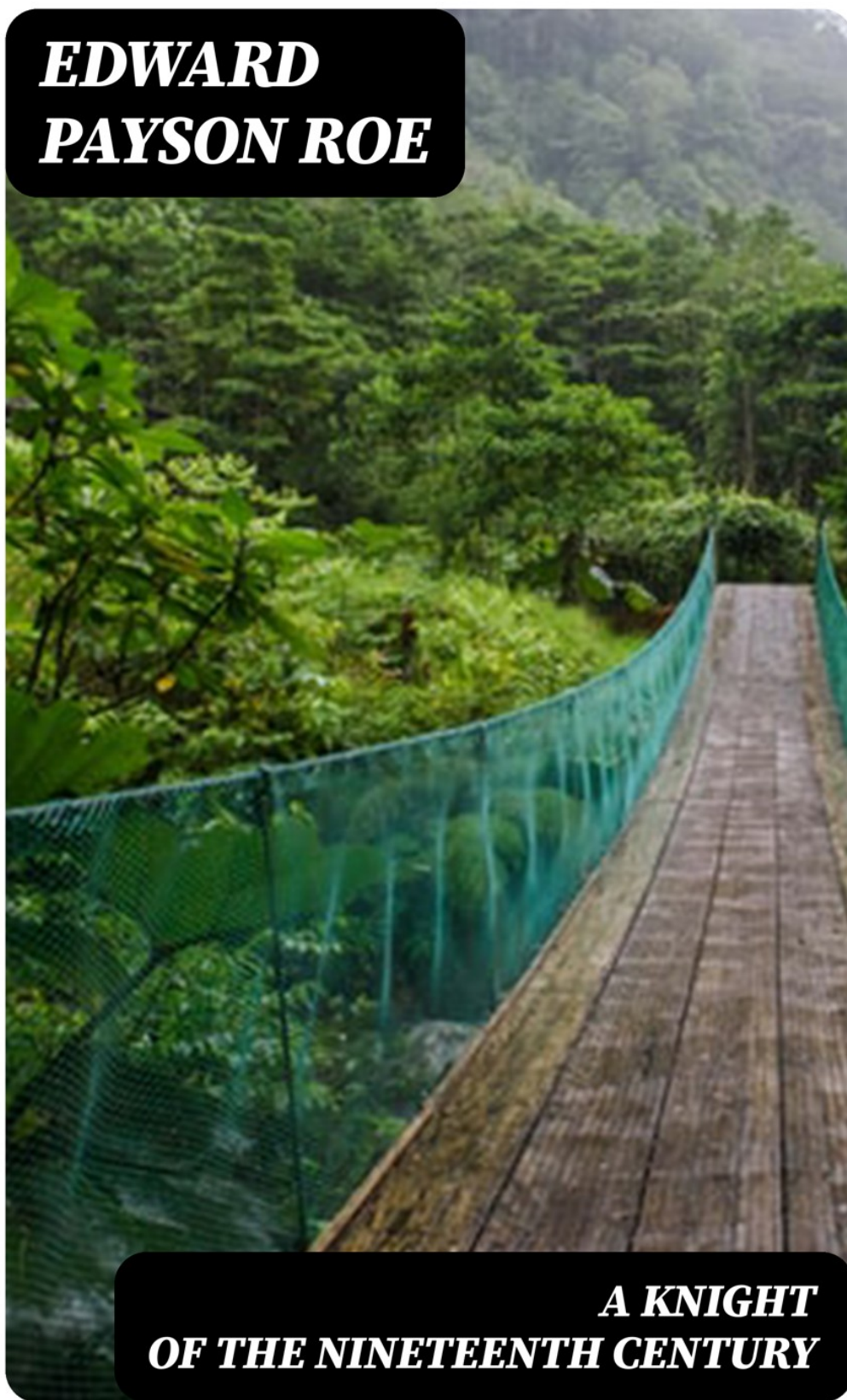


***EDWARD
PAYSON ROE***

***A KNIGHT
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY***

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Edward Payson Roe

A Knight of the Nineteenth Century

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**THIS BOOK IS REVERENTLY
DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MY
HONORED FATHER**

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He best deserves a knightly crest,
Who slays the evils that infest
His soul within. If victor here,
He soon will find a wider sphere.
The world is cold to him who pleads;
The world bows low to knightly deeds.

CORNWALL ON THE HUDSON, N.Y.

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CHAPTER I

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BAD TRAINING FOR A KNIGHT

Egbert Haldane had an enemy who loved him very dearly, and he sincerely returned her affection, as he was in duty bound, since she was his mother. If, inspired by hate and malice, Mrs. Haldane had brooded over but one question at the cradle of her child, How can I most surely destroy this boy? she could scarcely have set about the task more skilfully and successfully.

But so far from having any such malign and unnatural intention, Mrs. Haldane idolized her son. To make the paradox more striking, she was actually seeking to give him a Christian training and character. As he leaned against her knee Bible tales were told him, not merely for the sake of the marvellous interest which they ever have for children, but in the hope, also, that the moral they carry with them might remain as germinating seed. At an early age the mother had commenced taking him to church, and often gave him an admonitory nudge as his restless eyes wandered from the venerable face in the pulpit. In brief, the apparent influences of his early life were similar to those existing in multitudes of Christian homes. On general principles, it might be hoped that the boy's future would be

all that his friends could desire; nor did he himself in early youth promise so badly to superficial observers; and the son of the wealthy Mrs. Haldane was, on the part of the world, more the object of envy than of censure. But a close observer, who judged of characteristic tendencies and their results by the light of experience, might justly fear that the mother had unwittingly done her child irreparable wrong.

She had made him a tyrant and a relentless task-master even in his infancy. As his baby-will developed he found it supreme. His nurse was obliged to be a slave who must patiently humor every whim. He was petted and coaxed out of his frequent fits of passion, and beguiled from his obstinate and sulky moods by bribes. He was the eldest child and only son, and his little sisters were taught to yield to him, right or wrong, he lording it over them with the capricious lawlessness of an Eastern despot. Chivalric deference to woman, and a disposition to protect and honor her, is a necessary element of a manly character in our Western civilization; but young Haldane was as truly an Oriental as if he had been permitted to bluster around a Turkish harem; and those whom he should have learned to wait upon with delicacy and tact became subservient to his varying moods, developing that essential brutality which mars the nature of every man who looks upon woman as an inferior and a servant. He loved his mother, but he did not reverence and honor her. The thought ever uppermost in his mind was, "What ought she to do for me?" not, "What ought I to do for her?" and any effort to curb or guide on her part was met and thwarted by passionate or obstinate opposition from him. He loved his sisters after a fashion, because they

were his sisters; but so far from learning to think of them as those whom it would be his natural task to cherish and protect, they were, in his estimation, "nothing but girls," and of no account whatever where his interests were concerned.

In the most receptive period of life the poison of selfishness and self-love was steadily instilled into his nature. Before he had left the nursery he had formed the habit of disregarding the wills and wishes of others, even when his childish conscience told him that he was decidedly in the wrong. When he snatched his sisters' playthings they cried in vain, and found no redress. The mother made peace by smoothing over matters, and promising the little girls something else.

Of course, the boy sought to carry into his school life the same tendencies and habits which he had learned at home, and he ever found a faithful ally in his blind, fond mother. She took his side against his teachers; she could not believe in his oppressions of his younger playmates; she was absurdly indignant and resentful when some sturdy boy stood up for his own rights, or championed another's, and sent the incipient bully back to her, crying, and with a bloody nose. When the pampered youth was a little indisposed, or imagined himself so, he was coddled at home, and had bonbons and fairy tales in the place of lessons.

Judicious friends shook their heads ominously, and some even ventured to counsel the mother to a wiser course; but she ever resented such advice. The son was the image of his lost father, and her one impulse was to lavish upon him everything that his heart craved.

As if all this were not enough, she placed in the boy's way another snare, which seldom fails of proving fatal. He had only to ask for money to obtain it, no knowledge of its value being imparted to him. Even when he took it from his mother's drawer without asking, her chidings were feeble and irresolute. He would silence and half satisfy her by saying:

"You can take anything of mine that you want. It's all in the family; what difference does it make?"

Thus every avenue of temptation in the city which could be entered by money was open to him, and he was not slow in choosing those naturally attractive to a boy.

But while his mother was blind to the evil traits and tendencies which she was fostering with such ominous success, there were certain overt acts naturally growing out of her indulgences which would shock her inexpressibly, and evoke even from her the strongest expressions of indignation and rebuke. She was pre-eminently respectable, and fond of respect. She was a member "in good and regular standing" not only of her church, but also of the best society in the small inland city where she resided, and few greater misfortunes in her estimation could occur than to lose this status. She never hesitated to humor any of her son's whims and wishes which did not threaten their respectability, but the quick-witted boy was not long in discovering that she would not tolerate any of those vices and associations which society condemns.

There could scarcely have been any other result save that which followed. She had never taught him self-restraint; his own inclinations furnished the laws of his action, and the

wish to curb his desires because they were wrong scarcely ever crossed his mind. To avoid trouble with his mother, therefore, he began slyly and secretly to taste the forbidden fruits which her lavish supplies of money always kept within his reach. In this manner that most hopeless and vitiating of elements, deceitfulness, entered into his character. He denied to his mother, and sought to conceal from her, the truth that while still in his teens he was learning the gambler's infatuation and forming the inebriate's appetite. He tried to prevent her from knowing that many of his most intimate associates were such as he would not introduce to her or to his sisters.

He had received, however, a few counter-balancing advantages in his early life. With all her weaknesses, his mother was a lady, and order, refinement, and elegance characterized his home. Though not a gentleman at heart, on approaching manhood he habitually maintained the outward bearing that society demands. The report that he was a little fast was more than neutralized by the fact of his wealth. Indeed, society concluded that it had much more occasion to smile than to frown upon him, and his increasing fondness for society and its approval in some degree curbed his tendencies to dissipation.

It might also prove to his advantage that so much Christian and ethical truth had been lodged in his memory during early years. His mother had really taken pains to acquaint him with the Divine Man who "pleased not himself," even while she was practically teaching him to reverse this trait in his own character. Thus, while the youth's heart was sadly erratic, his head was tolerably

orthodox, and he knew theoretically the chief principles of right action. Though his conscience had never been truly awakened, it often told him that his action was unmanly, to say the least; and that was as far as any self-censure could reach at this time. But it might prove a fortunate thing that although thorns and thistles had been planted chiefly, some good seed had been scattered also, and that he had received some idea of a life the reverse of that which he was leading.

But thus far it might be said with almost literal truth, that young Haldane's acquaintance with Christian ethics had had no more practical effect upon his habitual action and thought than his knowledge of algebra. When his mother permitted him to snatch his sisters' playthings and keep them, when she took him from the school where he had received well-merited punishment, when she enslaved herself and her household to him instead of teaching considerate and loyal devotion to her, she nullified all the Christian instruction that she or any one else had given.

The boy had one very marked trait, which might promise well for the future, or otherwise, according to circumstances, and that was a certain wilful persistence, which often degenerated into downright obstinacy. Frequently, when his mother thought that she had coaxed or wheedled him into giving up something of which she did not approve, he would quietly approach his object in some other way, and gain his point, or sulk till he did. When he set his heart upon anything he was not as "unstable as water." While but an indifferent and superficial student, who had habitually escaped lessons and skipped difficulties, he

occasionally became nettled by a perplexing problem or task, and would work at it with a sort of vindictive, unrelenting earnestness, as if he were subduing an enemy. Having put his foot on the obstacle, and mastered the difficulty that piqued him, he would cast the book aside, indifferent to the study or science of which it formed but a small fraction.

After all, perhaps the best that could be said of him was that he possessed fair abilities, and was still subject to the good and generous impulses of youth. His traits and tendencies were, in the main, all wrong; but he had not as yet become confirmed and hardened in them. Contact with the world, which sooner or later tells a man the truth about himself, however unwelcome, might dissipate the illusion, gained from his mother's idolatry, that in some indefinite way he was remarkable in himself, and that he was destined to great things from a vague and innate superiority, which it had never occurred to him to analyze.

But as the young man approached his majority his growing habits of dissipation became so pronounced that even his willingly blind mother was compelled to recognize them. Rumor of his fast and foolish behavior took such definite shape as to penetrate the widow's aristocratic retirement, and to pass the barriers created by the reserve which she ever maintained in regard to personal and family matters. More than once her son came home in a condition so nearly resembling intoxication that she was compelled to recognize the cause, and she was greatly shocked and alarmed. Again and again she said to herself:

"I cannot understand how a boy brought up in the careful Christian manner that he has been can show such unnatural depravity. It is a dark, mysterious providence, to which I feel I cannot submit."

Though young Haldane was aware of his mother's intolerance of disreputable vices and follies, he was not prepared for her strong and even bitter condemnation of his action. Having never been taught to endure from her nor from any one the language of rebuke, he retorted as a son never should do in any circumstances, and stormy scenes followed.

Thus the mother was at last rudely awakened to the fact that her son was not a model youth, and that something must be done speedily, or else he might go to destruction, and in the meantime disgrace both himself and her—an event almost equally to be dreaded.

In her distress and perplexity she summoned her pastor, and took counsel with him. At her request the venerable man readily agreed to "talk to" the wayward subject, and thought that his folly and its consequences could be placed before the young man in such a strong and logical statement that it would convince him at once that he must "repent and walk in the ways of righteousness." If Haldane's errors had been those of doctrine, Dr. Marks would have been an admirable guide; but the trouble was that, while the good doctor was familiar with all the readings of obscure Greek and Hebrew texts, and all the shades of opinions resulting, he was unacquainted with even the alphabet of human nature. In approaching "a sinner," he had one formal and unvarying method, and he chose his course not from

the bearing of the subject himself, but from certain general theological truths which he believed applied to the "unrenewed heart of man as a fallen race." He rather prided himself upon calling a sinner a sinner, and all things else by their right names; and thus it is evident that he often had but little of the Pauline guile, which enabled the great apostle to entangle the wayward feet of Jew, Greek and Roman, bond and free, in heavenly snares.

The youth whom he was to convince and convert by a single broadside of truth, as it were, moved in such an eccentric orbit, that the doctor could never bring his heavy artillery to bear upon him. Neither coaxing nor scolding on the part of the mother could bring about the formal interview. At last, however, it was secured by an accident, and his mother felt thereafter, with a certain sense of consolation, that "all had been done that could be done."

Entering the parlor unexpectedly one afternoon, Haldane stumbled directly upon Dr. Marks, who opened fire at once, by saying:

"My young friend, this is quite providential, as I have long been wishing for an interview. Please be seated, for I have certain things to say which relate to your spiritual and temporal well-being, although the latter is a very secondary matter."

Haldane was too well bred to break rudely and abruptly away, and yet it must be admitted that he complied with very much the feeling and grace with which he would take a dentist's chair.

"My young friend, if you ever wish to be a saint you must first have a profound conviction that you are a sinner. I hope

that you realize that you are a sinner."

"I am quite content to be a gentleman," was the brusque reply.

"But as long as you remain an impenitent sinner you can never be even a true gentleman," responded the clergyman somewhat warmly.

Haldane had caught a shocked and warning look from his mother, and so did not reply. He saw that he was "in for it," as he would express himself, and surmised that the less he said the sooner the ordeal would be over. He therefore took refuge in a silence that was both sullen and resentful. He was too young and uncurbed to maintain a cold and impassive face, and his dark eyes occasionally shot vindictive gleams at both his mother and her ally, who had so unexpectedly caged him against his will. Fortunately the doctor was content, after he had got under way, to talk at, instead of to, his listener, and thus was saved the mortification of asking questions of one who would not have answered.

After the last sonorous period had been rounded, the youth arose, bowed stiffly, and withdrew, but with a heart overflowing with a malicious desire to retaliate. At the angle of the house stood the clergyman's steady-going mare, and his low, old-fashioned buggy. It was but the work of a moment to slip part of the shuck of a horse-chestnut, with its sharp spines, under the collar, so that when the traces drew upon it the spines would be driven into the poor beast's neck. Then, going down to the main street of the town, through which he knew the doctor must pass on his way home, he took his post of observation.

CHAPTER II

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BOTH APOLOGIZE

Haldane's hopes were realized beyond his anticipations, for the doctor's old mare—at first surprised and restless from the wounds made by the sharp spines—speedily became indignant and fractious, and at last, half frantic with pain, started on a gallop down the street, setting all the town agog with excitement and alarm.

With grim satisfaction Haldane saw the doctor's immaculate silk hat fly into the mud, his wig, blown comically awry, fall over his eyes, and his spectacles joggle down until they sat astride the tip of a rather prominent nose.

Having had his revenge he at once relented, and rushing out in advance of some others who were coming to the rescue, he caught the poor beast, and stopped her so suddenly that the doctor was nearly precipitated over the dashboard. Then, pretending to examine the harness to see that nothing was broken, he quietly removed the cause of irritation, and the naturally sedate beast at once became far more composed than her master, for, as a bystander remarked, the venerable doctor was "dreadfully shuck up." It was quite in keeping with Haldane's disingenuous nature

to accept the old gentleman's profuse thanks for the rescue. The impulse to carry his mischief still further was at once acted upon, and he offered to see the doctor safely home.

His services were eagerly accepted, for the poor man was much too unnerved to take the reins again, though, had he known it, the mare would now have gone to the parsonage quietly, and of her own accord.

The doctor was gradually righted up and composed. His wig, which had covered his left eye, was arranged decorously in its proper place, and the gold-rimmed spectacles pressed back so that the good man could beam mildly and gratefully upon his supposed preserver. The clerical hat, however, had lost its character beyond recovery, and though its owner was obliged to wear it home, it must be confessed that it did not at all comport with the doctor's dignity and calling.

Young Haldane took the reins with a great show of solicitude and vigilance, appearing to dread another display of viciousness from the mare, that was now most sheeplike in her docility; and thus, with his confiding victim, he jogged along through the crowded street, the object of general approval and outspoken commendation.

"My dear young friend," began the doctor fervently, "I feel that you have already repaid me amply for my labors in your behalf."

"Thank you," said Haldane demurely; "I think we are getting even."

"This has been a very mysterious affair," continued the doctor musingly; "surely 'a horse is a vain thing for safety.' One is almost tempted to believe that demoniacal

possession is not wholly a thing of the past. Indeed, I could not think of anything else while Dolly was acting so viciously and unaccountably."

"I agree with you," responded Haldane gravely, "she certainly did come down the street like the devil."

The doctor was a little shocked at this putting of his thoughts into plain English, for it sounded somewhat profanely. But he was in no mood to find fault with his companion, and they got on very well together to the end of their brief journey. The young scapegrace was glad, indeed, that it was brief, for his self-control was fast leaving him, and having bowed a rather abrupt farewell to the doctor, he was not long in reaching one of his haunts, from which during the evening, and quite late into the night, came repeated peals of laughter, that grew more boisterous and discordant as that synonyme of mental and moral anarchy, the "spirit of wine," gained the mastery.

The tidings of her son's exploit in rescuing the doctor were not long in reaching Mrs. Haldane, and she felt that the good seed sown that day had borne immediate fruit. She longed to fold him in her arms and commend his courage, while she poured out thanksgiving that he himself had escaped uninjured, which immunity, she believed, must have resulted from the goodness and piety of the deed. But when he at last appeared with step so unsteady and utterance so thick that even she could not mistake the cause, she was bewildered and bitterly disappointed by the apparent contradictoriness of his action; and when he, too far gone for dissimulation, described and acted out in pantomime the doctor's plight and appearance, she became

half hysterical from her desire to laugh, to cry, and to give vent to her kindling indignation.

This anger was raised almost to the point of white heat on the morrow. The cause of the old mare's behavior, and the interview which had led to the practical joke, soon became an open secret, and while it convulsed the town with laughter, it also gave the impression that young Haldane was in a "bad way."

It was not long before Mrs. Haldane received a note from an indignant fellow church-member, in which, with some disagreeable comment, her son's conduct was plainly stated. She was also informed that the doctor had become aware of the rude jest of which he had been the subject. Mrs. Haldane was almost furious; but her son grew sullen and obstinate as the storm which he had raised increased. The only thing he would say as an apology or excuse amounted to this:

"What else could he expect from one who he so emphatically asserted was a sinner?"

The mother wrote at once to the doctor, and was profuse in her apologies and regrets, but was obliged to admit to him that her son was beyond her control.

When the doctor first learned the truth his equanimity was almost as greatly disturbed as it had been on the previous day, and his first emotions were obviously those of wrath. But a little thought brought him to a better mood.

He was naturally deficient in tact, and his long habit of dwelling upon abstract and systematic truth had diminished his power of observantly and intuitively gauging the character of the one with whom he was dealing. He

therefore often failed woefully in adaptation, and his sermons occasionally went off into rarefied realms of moral space, where nothing human existed. But his heart was true and warm, and his Master's cause of far more consequence to him than his own dignity.

As he considered the matter maturely he came to the conclusion that there must have been something wrong on both sides. If he had presented the truth properly the young man could not have acted so improperly. After recalling the whole affair, he became satisfied that he had relied far too much on his own strong logic, and it had seemed to him that it must convince. He had forgotten for the moment that those who would do good should be very humble, and that, in a certain sense, they must take the hand of God, and place it upon the one whom they would save.

Thus the honest old clergyman tried to search out the error and weakness which had led to such a lamentable failure in his efforts; and when at last Mrs. Haldane's note of sorrowful apology and motherly distress reached him, his anger was not only gone, but his heart was full of commiseration for both herself and her son. He at once sat down, and wrote her a kind and consolatory letter, in which he charged her hereafter to trust less to the "arm of flesh" and more to the "power of God." He also inclosed a note to the young man, which his mother handed to him with a darkly reproachful glance. He opened it with a contemptuous frown, expecting to find within only indignant upbraidings; but his face changed rapidly as he read the following words:

"MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND—I hardly know which of us should apologize. I now perceive and frankly admit that there was wrong on my side. I could not have approached you and spoken to you in the right spirit, for if I had, what followed could not have occurred. I fear there was a self-sufficiency in my words and manner yesterday, which made you conscious of Dr. Marks only, and you had no scruples in dealing with Dr. Marks as you did. If my words and bearing had brought you face to face with my august yet merciful Master, you would have respected Him, and also me, His servant. I confess that I was very angry this morning, for I am human. But now I am more concerned lest I have prejudiced you against Him by whom alone we all are saved. Yours faithfully,

"ZEBULON MARKS."

The moment Haldane finished reading the note he left the room, and his mother heard him at the hat-rack in the hall, preparing to go out. She, supposing that he was again about to seek some of his evil haunts, remonstrated sharply; but, without paying the slightest attention to her words, he departed, and within less than half an hour rang the bell at the parsonage.

Dr. Marks could scarcely believe his eyes as the young man was shown into his study, but he welcomed him as cordially as though nothing unpleasant had occurred between them.

After a moment's hesitation and embarrassment Haldane began:

"When I read your note this evening I had not the slightest doubt that I was the one to apologize, and I sincerely ask your pardon."

The old gentleman's eyes grew moist, and he blew his nose in a rather unusual manner. But he said promptly:

"Thank you, my young friend, thank you. I appreciate this. But no matter about me. How about my Master? won't you become reconciled to Him?"

"I suppose by that you mean, won't you be a Christian?"

"That is just what I mean and most desire. I should be willing to risk broken bones any day to accomplish that."

Haldane smiled, shook his head, and after a moment said:

"I must confess that I have not the slightest wish to become a Christian."

The old gentleman's eager and interested expression changed instantly to one of the deepest sorrow and commiseration. At the same time he appeared bewildered and perplexed, but murmured, more in soliloquy than as an address to the young man:

"O Ephraim! how shall I give thee up?"

Haldane was touched by the venerable man's tone and manner, more than he would have thought possible, and, feeling that he could not trust himself any longer, determined to make his escape as soon as practicable. But as he rose to take his leave he said, a little impulsively:

"I feel sure, sir, that if you had spoken and looked yesterday as you do this evening I would not have—I would not have—"

"I understand, my young friend; I now feel sure that I was more to blame than yourself, and your part is already forgiven and forgotten. I am now only solicitous about *you*."

"You are very kind to feel so after what has happened, and I will say this much—If I ever do wish to become a Christian, there is no one living to whom I will come for counsel more quickly than yourself. Good-night, sir."

"Give me your hand before you go."

It was a strong, warm, lingering grasp that the old man gave, and in the dark days of temptation that followed, Haldane often felt that it had a helping and sustaining influence.

"I wish I could hold on to you," said the doctor huskily; "I wish I could lead you by loving force into the paths of pleasantness and peace. But what I can't do, God can. Good-by, and God bless you."

Haldane fled rather precipitously, for he felt that he was becoming constrained by a loving violence that was as mysterious as it was powerful. Before he had passed through the main street of the town, however, a reckless companion placed an arm in his, and led him to one of their haunts, where he drank deeper than usual, that he might get rid of the compunctions which the recent interview had occasioned.

His mother was almost in despair when he returned. He had, indeed, become to her a terrible and perplexing problem. As she considered the legitimate results of her own weak indulgence she would sigh again and again:

"Never was there a darker and more mysterious providence. I feel that I can neither understand it nor