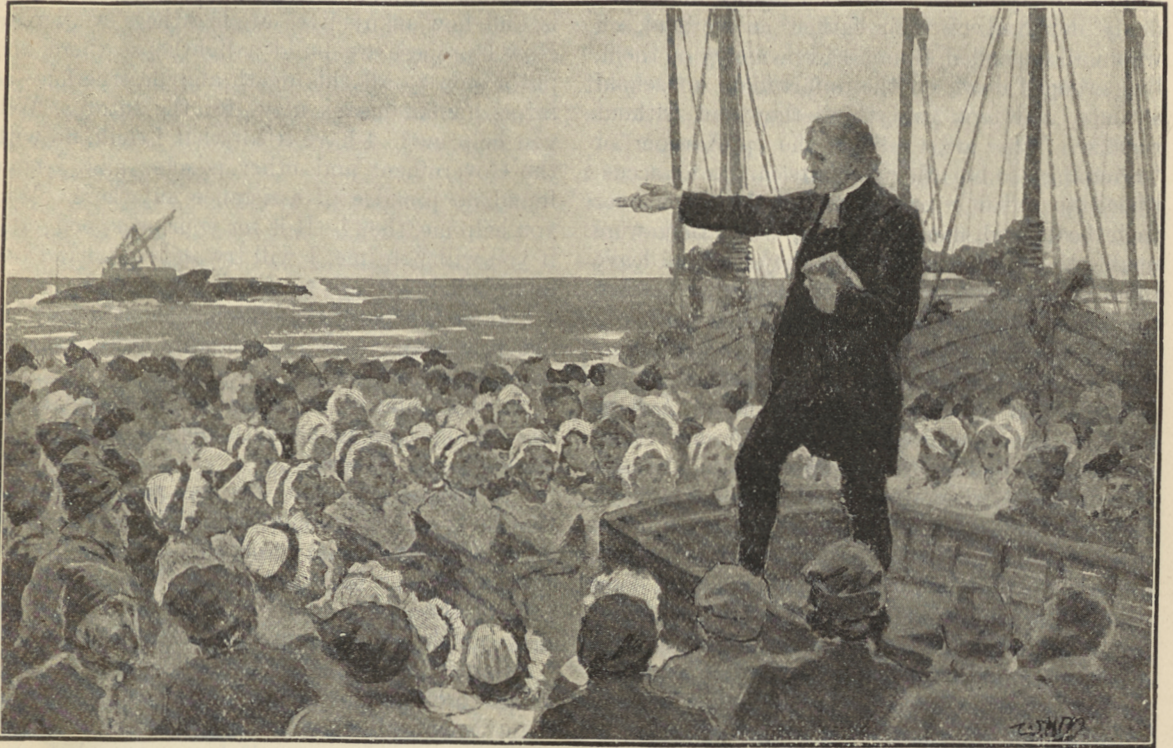


THE PARSON'S LIGHTHOUSE.

A COMPLETE STORY.

BY J. F. ROWBOTHAM, M.A., AUTHOR OF "SOLOMON BUILT HIM AN HOUSE," ETC. ETC.



"Held a great open-air service on the shore."—p 463.

THE little village of Sandiford stands on the Dorsetshire coast, and its population consists entirely of fishermen and their wives and families. All along the shore in a limitless line are the fishing-boats drawn up; behind them the sheds which the fishermen use for some mysterious purpose of their craft, and behind these again, on a low eminence, the cottages. Of these latter there are about five or six hundred in all, containing as many families, and a population of about two or three thousand souls.

There was not a hamlet or a house near Sandiford. It was isolated from all surroundings save those of the sea and the sand, and the inhabitants were as primitive and unconventional a race as you could wish to see. They were said to be the descendants of an old Norse colony who settled here before the Conquest, and have contrived to maintain their footing and their nationality in a marvellous manner ever since. The men wore the thick blue jerseys and the red caps of the French fishermen, and the women were remarkable for their neat kirtles and quaint head-gear, which may be seen in some seaside villages in Normandy at the present day.

Not only for their spiritual and intellectual wants, but in a great measure for many of their physical ones likewise, the inhabitants were dependent on their clergyman—their "parson," as they universally called him—who was the leading inhabitant of the village. The various physical wants we allude to were the supply of savouries and delicacies at time of illness, of medicines whenever necessary, of clothing frequently, of blankets, bedding very often, and indeed of the entire furniture of a cottage sometimes, when a family, left suddenly destitute by the death of its father and bread-winner, was turned out of house and home by an iniquitous landlord, and was enabled to recommence life again by the kindness of the "Parson of the Fisher-folk."

The Rev. Gerald Montague was perpetual curate of Sandiford. He was called a vicar, but was only a titular one. He had come to the village as curate-in-charge a great many years ago, and had grown to be so interested in the people and their quaint ways that he had stayed there, despite that other preferment had been offered him; and he had grown grey in his devotion to the villagers and his affectionate interest in all their wants,

Another leading personage in Sandiford was Simon Weale, the land agent of the principal proprietor in Sandiford, who was a London merchant who never came near his property. Simon had it all his own way with the villagers, and a malevolent tyrant he was. If a family were suddenly deprived of their father, as we said, on whom all depended, Simon had no mercy on them, but swooped down on the unfortunate household at once, and took everything they had without remorse. He also added the profession of "crimping" to his other pursuits, and was accustomed to advance money to the fishermen over their boats and nets, and then, when they were unable to pay, to seize all that they had and leave them as penniless as their households were when the father of the family was drowned at sea.

The iniquities, the tyrannies, which were practised by this man in the name of business would pass belief, if we were to recount them. And he and Mr. Montague were constantly brought into conflict with one another—sometimes at the side of a death-bed, sometimes in the confusion of an eviction; now at one scene of misery, now at another—the clergyman with forbidding gesture and air of profound compassion, the wily land agent, with unmistakable greed, avarice, and slyness stamped in his face, acknowledging one another as mutual antagonists and often exchanging hard words and recriminations which showed full well what their natural feelings were.

The great cause of the shipwrecks at Sandiford, and therefore the cause of half the distress of the village, was a rock known as the Raven's Crag, which lay not far from the entrance to the little harbour of Sandiford, and could be reached at low water, for the tide there ran out an enormous distance.

The rock which at high water was exactly like a great black raven with spread wings hovering on the wave, but which at low water showed the proportions of a good-sized mound, lay at a most awkward place in the harbour's mouth, between a sand-bank on one side and a shelving group of rocks called "the Saw Mills" on the other side. Both these obstacles were well-known dangers to the fisher-navigators, and were carefully avoided by them. But in steering clear of these, boat after boat, at certain sets of the tide, ran straight on the Raven's Crag, which gored the hapless craft like the familiar "horns of an angry bull" in Longfellow's poem, and had sent boatful after boatful of brave men to destruction.

The Rev. Gerald Montague at last resolved to build a lighthouse on it, and by erecting a lighthouse on this spot of danger hoped to save, as he computed, perhaps twenty lives a year, and a dozen families or thereabouts from ruin and misery. First and foremost, therefore, he applied to the

Lighthouse Commission, but could get no aid from them. Next he memorialised the Government on the subject, but his memorial was quite unattended to. Finally, he called a meeting of the villagers.

"My friends," began Mr. Montague, "you are well aware what a dangerous place Raven's Crag is, and how many lives are lost there every year. Now I propose we build a lighthouse there, and put a stop to all this death and destruction—as far as human means may—for the future. Will you help me? I have tried what I could do with the Government and other people; and I have found no promise of assistance anywhere. Will you help me, then? It is for your own good; and if you will help me, I will try and see what I can do myself."

"Three cheers for the parson!" shouted a sturdy old fisherman; and the plaudits were heartily given by all present.

At this point of the meeting Simon Weale got up, and, looking round with his cunning face on those present, he said—

"It speaks very well for the parson, friends, that he is willing to build this lighthouse himself if we will assist him; and so I think we ought to take him at his word. If he will provide the bulk of the money, and we with our subscriptions make up the rest, I suppose that will do?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Montague. "I don't say I will provide the money—for I am not a rich man, as you all know; but I will endeavour to get it from some quarter, if I am assured of your hearty co-operation. You know what a valuable work it is, what a necessary one; and I rely on you to contribute to the utmost of your means."

"It would be advisable to open a subscription fund," said Weale; "and I for one am ready to put down my name—aye, and I'm ready to procure the greater part of the money from my master, Mr. Bray, the city merchant, if the parson will go security for it."

This proposition quite took Mr. Montague aback, who had no anticipation of matters being so promptly proceeded with. He half-feared some trick on the part of Simon Weale, and said as much; but that worthy stoutly averred that the money should be forthcoming if Mr. Montague would undertake the responsibility of its repayment, and before the meeting was over the good-natured clergyman had half-consented to the scheme.

Mr. Montague's living was not a good one, and he had hard work to make both ends meet, consistently with the generous profusion of charity which he maintained to the poor and distressed, and on which he spent far more than on the satisfaction of his own wants. He had, moreover, a son—Harry Montague—whom it had been his dearest wish to send to college, but whom he had

reluctantly kept at home hitherto, educating him himself, so as to economise as far as possible his slender income from Sandiford, and not to interfere with or curtail the large proportion of that income which was spent in acts of charity.

The time had now come when it was necessary that Harry should matriculate, if he ever did at all. He was now twenty years of age, and that was almost too late to begin college—or certainly quite late enough. The young man was eagerly looking forward for the promised permission to enter the university.

That evening his father arrived home from the meeting, looking worried and harassed.

“What is it, father?” asked Harry Montague.

“It is just this, my boy. I am anxious, as you know, that you should enter at Oxford next term, and indeed have written to the bursar of my own college about the matter, and have got all the preliminaries settled. And now this question of a lighthouse has cropped up in a most unexpected manner. The money, it appears, can be provided, if we accept it at once; but if we hesitate, and do not close with Mr. Bray’s offer——”

“Mr. Bray’s!” ejaculated Harry. “Oh, then, it is Simon Weale who is getting the money for you. Take care, father!”

“I am taking care, my boy. But twenty human lives a year—think of that, Harry! and all the families that come to ruin for the want of that lighthouse! And now the money is within our grasp, if we can only use it.”

“What is your difficulty then, father?”

“It is this. I must be the security for the money, and if I am that, good-bye to all prospects of your going to college for this year certainly, and very likely for good.”

“Well, father, and what is your wish?”

“My wish, my son? My wish would be that both my heart’s desires should be gratified; but God does not generally vouchsafe such happiness to men.”

The outcome of a long debate between the father and the son, which lasted until late in the night, was that the preservation of many human lives was of more importance than the liberal education of one brain. And it was determined between them that Harry Montague should give up all thoughts of the university, and should take up sheep-farming in Australia instead, where Mr. Montague had a brother who had made a great success in that branch of industry. This would liberate the necessary sum of money to make the requisite advances, and to lodge the amount which was required as security for the loan from Mr. Bray.

It was a grand example of self-sacrifice on the part of Harry Montague, and an equally noble piece of self-abnegation on his father’s side; for to

see his son go to college had been Mr. Montague’s heart’s desire for years past, and now he was giving it up for the sake of his fisher-folk. To save their lives he was sacrificing his son’s prospects. Yet in the sight of God he felt he was taking the proper course. “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.” This text and this thought ran in the vicar’s mind. How bitter it was in practice! How hard to put it into execution cheerfully and heartily!

Time wore on. Harry Montague sailed for Australia, and the money arrived from Mr. Bray in London which was to commence the building of the much-desired structure for the benefit of the village. The day that the first slabs of stone were planted on the solid shoulders of Raven’s Crag, and, stone after stone being piled there, the rim of saving masonry was seen crowning the dangerous cliff, was a day of exultation and of glory for the “Parson of the Fisher-folk.” All the villagers turned out in their gayest habiliments. Flags were run up mast-high on most of the fishing-smacks which lined the shore. Joyful and cheering crowds thronged the beach, where the first indications of a rising lighthouse were seen, and Mr. Montague was beset by congratulations and greeted by the most respectful and grateful acknowledgments of his generous kindness on every side.

“There goes the saviour of Sandiford,” said one group of men as he passed.

“And not only a saviour now, but a saviour always,” said a woman who was standing by them. “Has not he saved me and all my family from ruin, when the rock which is now going to be protected struck my husband’s boat and sent him and my two sons to the bottom? Not only a saviour now, but a saviour always.”

“God bless you, sir!” exclaimed another woman among a knot of people as the vicar passed. “Many and many a stormy night have I sat at my window watching to see if I could make out boats coming into harbour. And I’ve dreaded and feared in every nerve of my body, for fear my poor Bill should run on Raven’s Crag; but now it will be so no more. He’ll sail in safely, when he’s once got so far, and every night I greet him I shall think of you, sir, and thank you.”

“And thank God, too, Mrs. Childers,” added Mr. Montague.

“Yes, thank God and the parson,” put in an old man who was listening. “First God, and then the parson. For God has given the stone to build the lighthouse, and the parson is building it.”

Mr. Montague took advantage of the opportunity to hold a great open-air service on the shore, and within sight of the future lighthouse, at which he exhorted the assembled crowds most effectually by benefit of the graphic illustration near at hand. He warned them of the fleeting nature of human

this point in the fortunes of the building, so strangely begun and so heroically carried on, that a most reprehensible incident occurred—an incident in which the leading mover was Simon Weale.

Of late, owing to the heavy expenses he was incurring, and the embarrassments into which his scheme had led him, Mr. Montague had been obliged to cease the doles of money and food, the gifts of clothing, blankets, etc., which he was in the habit of bestowing on his parishioners. The fisher-people, instead of finding an excuse for their pastor who was so nobly embarrassing himself for their benefit, grumbled that he was neglecting them; and these grumbles, beginning as ill-natured remarks, broke out at last into open reproach and abusive language. Even the people to whom the "parson" had been most kind turned round upon him because his favours had been discontinued.

Simon Weale was indefatigable in fanning this feeling and exaggerating this discontent. He did not actually address meetings, but he went from house to house talking to everybody and making all dissatisfied. At last a mob met on the village green, and one stalwart fisherman, mounting on the fragment of a barge, addressed the others:—

"Look here, mates, we're not a-going to stand Parson Montague with his canting piety riding the high horse over us. He's a bit too good for us, that chap. He used to give us clothes and blankets, and bottles of wine; but where are they now? He hates us more than he loves us now, I fancy; and for that cause he denies us all his little presents, and laughs in our faces. Let us go and give him a piece of our mind at his parsonage or somewhere else. Let us break his windows for him, or——"

"Or wreck his lighthouse," put in a villainous-looking fisherman, the worst man in the place, Jack Maule.

"Aye, or wreck his lighthouse," echoed half a dozen voices. "He's had our money and subscriptions for the work, and we never see the good of them. The lighthouse is never finished——"

"So let us finish it for him!" exclaimed Maule, with a hoarse laugh.

"Aye! we'll finish it for him, and no mistake!" echoed the others; and with a great roar of voices and many oaths intermixed they moved in a posse towards the lighthouse.

Now it happened that this night for the first time the lantern was to be lighted. After months—and, in fact, two or three years—of laborious toil, the lighthouse had reached that point of elevation above the waters when the lantern could be set in it with certainty of success, and could cast from thence its saving beams over the waters. Another event was also expected to take place to-night—this was the arrival of Harry Montague, the vicar's son, on his return voyage from Australia. After

having been absent for nearly two years, he was now homeward bound, and his vessel was to touch at Sandiford harbour to-night and to land the young man at his father's village. He whose money had so signally financed the lighthouse—for it was Harry's money rather than the vicar's which had kept the scheme from failure—was, strange to say, to be the first to reap the benefit of its illumining ray.

All this the crowd knew tolerably well, but seemed perfectly indifferent to, in the stolid hostility to Mr. Montague which had now seized them. The "parson" himself was standing by the lighthouse directing the illumining of the lantern, ere the tide rose too high to make his superintendence impossible. The waves were even now washing his feet, when, from behind the rock, with a yell and a roar, the crowd swept on him. Simon Weale was at their head.

"What are you going to do? What is the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Montague in a voice of unfeigned alarm.

"This is the matter," cried some of the men with oaths and curses, "that we're not a-going to let you go and waste our money in this way. We wants value for our money, and not an everlasting put-off."

"The lighthouse is ready—it is now completed," exclaimed Mr. Montague; "and not owing to your beggarly money, men, but to mine and my son's."

"Our *beggarly* money! Hear how he talks!" cried one of the fishermen, and, seizing a stone, he threw it deliberately at the lighted lantern, dashing the fragile glass to pieces.

"There! our beggarly money helped to buy that glass at all events, and now there's an end of that."

This action was the signal for a work of wholesale destruction such as it would be hard to find a parallel for. The men climbed on to the lighthouse, tore down the stones, broke up the iron-work, and, despite the prayers and entreaties of Mr. Montague, never desisted till they had laid the whole artful edifice in ruins.

When they had completed their work of destruction they adjourned to the gin-house of the village, there to finish the evening, taking the parsonage *en route* and breaking every window in the vicar's dwelling as a further evidence of their feeling.

That evening a dull silence and a pitch blackness overhung Sandiford harbour. The light of the lantern which ought to have been there was absent, and no fisherman's boat would willingly have entered the harbour on such a night of ill-omen and gloom. But a huge vessel, bound to Southampton from Australia, had for weeks past been steadily forging on through sea and wave to the very spot now in all the world perhaps the most dangerous and to be dreaded. This was the great ship *Arizona*, in which sailed Harry

Montague with all his money from Australia, to be disembarked at Sandiford by the kindness of the captain.

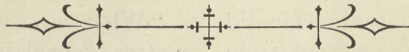
The lighthouse had been promised to the vessel when she was at Lisbon—the harbour had been described as having a lighthouse by the last despatch, and the light was to be in when the boat arrived; but the Board of Navigation had reckoned without Simon Weale and the Sandiford fishermen. There was a great looming mass seen in the blackness of the harbour. Then suddenly a crack—a crash—a shipwreck! The *Arizona* struck on the Raven's Crag owing to the want of the light, and every soul on board perished.

There was consternation in the fishing village that night, but next morning the appearance of the shore added still more agitation to the feeling.

Conspicuous among those whom Providence had washed up on the beach was Harry Montague—dead and drowned—and by his side lay his chest filled with gold and money.

A crowd had collected round him, and someone went and told the vicar that his son's body was recovered. "The Parson of the Fisher-folk" came down to the shore. All the people, conscience-stricken, moved away from him as he advanced to the scene of the tragedy. He fell on his son's neck. For a long while nature asserted her rights over him, and his grief was terrible; but at last he rose to his feet, and, looking at the circle of people who stood around him—

"My friends," he said, laying his hands on the treasure-chest, "I shall recommence building the lighthouse to-morrow."



THE STORY OF ACHAN.

BY THE VERY REV. F. W. FARRAR, D.D., DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

"And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done."—JOSHUA vii. 19, 20.



THE lessons of the story of Achan resemble those in the story of Balaam in their great main outlines; but they set them before us under the most widely different circumstances. One of the infinite advantages of Scripture, and one source of

its inexhaustible charm, lies in the fact that it is so human. It sets great truths before us, not only generally and in the abstract, but in the life-histories of men and women like ourselves; and in studying all these lives I would urge you always to go straight to the heart of their central moral and spiritual significance. There are many ways of reading Scripture which are purely fanciful, others which are superstitious, and others which are useless and unwise. For instance, a vast amount of trouble and ingenuity is spent over Scripture plants, and animals, and precious stones, and minute questions of genealogy and ethnology which are all very well in their way, but which have nothing in the world to do with religion, and are of almost infinitesimal importance as regards any real intelligence of Scripture. Then there are most elaborate attempts to support a false mechanical theory of verbal dictation, to reconcile small discrepancies and weave a web of plausible casuistry over difficulties which, after all,

can deceive no one except professed apologists. And, thirdly, attention fixes itself in the most unwholesome way on some particular problem of the narrative about which opinions will differ till the end of time, while men absolutely miss the deep essential instruction. For instance, in reading the story of Balaam volumes have been wasted to prove that the dumb ass did actually speak with man's voice and forbid the madness of the prophet; whereas others, with much deeper insight and knowledge, hold that the passage does not represent a literal miracle at all, but a spiritual miracle; that it is a parable and allegory, such as is common in Eastern legends, signifying that sometimes all the world seems to see, and to protest against, the spiritual infatuation which a man penally blinded will not see for himself. Similarly, in reading the story of Jonah, they "pore over the whale and forget God." Now the explanation of the miracles, the ass and the whale, are matters of no spiritual concern whatever, and to dwell on these while we miss the glorious instruction for our souls with which both narratives are crowded in every line, is exactly what the spirits of evil would be quite content that we should do. Similarly in the story of Achan, Christians set themselves to defend the horrible massacre at Jericho, and the extirpation of the innocent as well as the guilty in the family of the transgressor. I shall pass over both events. They belong, in my opinion, to the crude and