

# IF I DIE TO-NIGHT.



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## “If I Die To-night—”

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**W**HAT a strange place for a meeting?” So people thought and said; but the owner of the coach-house, the late Dowager Lady Fowell Buxton, of Cromer, Norfolk, felt honored in being able to put it to so good an account.

The meeting was over, the audience had dispersed, the young coachman was putting out the lamps, when Mr. S. B——d, the gentleman who had been speaking, suddenly returned for something he had left behind. Having found it, he was on the point of again leaving, when the coachman’s inquiring look caught his eye; he stayed, and said, kindly:

“Well, James, have you decided on whose side you mean to take your stand for time and eternity?”

“Indeed, sir,” said the young man lightly, “I think there is plenty of time for the likes of us,” looking at his young wife beside him. “Of course, we hopes to go to heaven like other people; but we

are young, and have a long life before us, and don't trouble about that yet.”

“What!” exclaimed Mr. B., kindly, but gravely, “do you trifle *thus* with *eternal* consequences? Have you been assured of ‘a long life,’ that you can talk so flippantly about ‘plenty of time,’ and ‘hoping to get to heaven’? Know you not that this very night your soul may be required of you? Then as you are not converted, you must inevitably descend to hell! James, I entreat you to look the matter fairly in the face.

“Will you do one thing for me, now, — to-night, before you go to bed? Will you take a sheet of paper, write on it these words, *If I die to-night, I'll go to hell!* and fasten it over the head of your bed?”

James replied respectfully, he would do what the gentleman asked him, without thinking much of it at the time.

They went to their little house in the yard; and, after supper, were just retiring to rest, when his wife said, “Oh, James, you've forgotten to do what you promised the gentleman.”

“So I have! Bring me the ink and some paper, and I will do it now,” said he, thoughtlessly.

Now, James was not a bad man; but, like most of his age, indifferent: thinking if he did his duty,

and kept himself out of evil company and the like, he did very well. Of course, he was not “fit to die,” but he did not think of dying yet; he meant to give it more serious consideration “by and by.”

The paper, pen, and ink were brought. James knelt down by the table, and with a flourish began to write in large hand across the paper, *If I die to-night*, and then he stopped, and looked at it.

Really it was very solemn! It brought death closer home to him than he had ever had it before. He was serious enough now. And as he pondered it, the clock over the coach-house in the yard struck *ten*. It sounded like the knell of his departure — *I die to-night*. He trembled. He was not ready.

His past life rose before him. His sins moved by in awful, silent review. There was no relief to his mind; no blood that *he* knew; no Cross, save as he had heard, but given no heed to — like other young men reading this do now. Be warned! And, if he died to-night, what — then? Mechanically his hand wrote — *I'll go to hell*.

How he started. There, in his own writing, was the answer to his thoughts. The room appeared to grow darker. The gloom on his soul deepened. Could he pin that dreadful sentence over his head, and sleep? Never! It made him shudder to think

of it. Not in all his life before had he passed through so much. He had not thus faced the truth — he knew it was the truth. What should he do? How escape? He felt riveted to the spot. His eyes glued to the paper — a sermon, short, pointed, personal, written by himself. Surely his heart must burst. And as he thought, a drop fell, a tiny drop, but his quick eye caught it, — fell on the last letter of that last dread word, and blurred it. Whence came it? Another fell! He looked up hastily; his young wife’s eyes were full, and, as he looked, they quite overflowed. ’Twas the last straw.

And drawing her to kneel down there beside him, they wept together. Wept, to think of their thoughtlessness! Wept, as danger, near, but unfelt before, was felt now. Wept, as the sin of their life past came to remembrance.

The clock in the yard struck *eleven*. They were weeping still; and loud rose their cries for mercy.

The clock struck *twelve*. And as the midnight hour tolled out distinctly on the silent air, they cried anew for mercy, as if the day of mercy too were going fast.

The night grew cold, but they felt it not. The icy horror of dying, and going to hell, was colder still.

The clock struck *one*. Then James said, “Get down the Bible, wife, and let us see if we can find any comfort there, for this despair is too awful to endure.”

Eagerly they turned the pages of God’s own word, not knowing where to look, yet in their deep anxiety searching on, sure that here, if anywhere, escape was to be learned. But it seemed to them as if all they saw written there was but a confirmation of their worst fears. Awful holiness of a God forgotten. Solemn judgment of sin. Sure wrath to come.

Thus does the Holy Spirit of God deepen conviction in the soul, and probe the wounded spirit with the lancet of the Word of God, that there may be no “healing slightly.”

The clock in the yard struck *two*. They were on their knees still. Now, eagerly scanning the sacred page; now, turning away in agony of soul, as each time they looked, but showed them more forcibly the sentence of God against sin. — “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ez. xviii. 20.) “He, that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” (Prov. xxix. 1)

“The wages of sin is death.” (Rom. vi. 23.)

The clock struck *three*.

No light yet. The candle burned low in the socket, and with a last gasp, as if in despair, went out. No thought of rest—their hearts were too heavy. No rest for them, until they obtained rest to their burdened spirits. Bitterly they lamented their misspent and neglected years.

The clock struck *four*. The gray light of morning stole softly into that little room, but they did not heed it. Darkly brooded the gloom on their souls, needing more than nature's light to dispel. Now James raised his head, and said, “Oh, wife! this cannot go on any longer. Surely I have heard of a Saviour who died for sinners like us. Surely this book tells how God can pardon our sins through the blood of Christ.”

Thus speaking, he drew again the Bible towards him, and read—read, just where it had fallen open, when they pushed it from them: “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” (Is. xliii. 25.) Did his eyes deceive him? Were these words really there? How had he not seen them before? What light shone into his heart! What hope was in his voice, as, quickly pointing them out to his wife, he tremblingly, yet joyously, exclaimed, “See, wife,

this is what we want! Oh, let us look for some confirmation of this word.”

They turned on, and in the next chapter read, in verse 22, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee.”

“It is enough, O Lord,” they cried; “we do come to Thee now through Thy Son, *our* Saviour Jesus Christ;” and raised their tearful eyes in happy thanksgiving to heaven, “We praise Thee for so great love, in forgiving so great sinners.”

And that summer morning, as the clock in the yard struck *five*, these two anxious, seeking souls found — what you, reader, may also — peace through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

A new life, thus commenced, soon manifested itself; and James shortly began to warn others of that which he had escaped — dying and going to hell. For a few years he lived a consistent life; preaching in the country round, and then did not die and go to hell, but departed “to be with Christ, which is far better.”

Young man, were you to die to-night, where would you find yourself? *In heaven, or hell? Which?*

J. C. R.