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THE THUNDERSTORM;

OR,

THE HISTORY OF
TOM WATSON,

THE UNNATURAL SON;

BEING A WARNING TO ALL CHILDREN.



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THE HISTORY OF
TOMMY ATOP
AND HIS FRIENDS
WHO WENT TO A CHURCH



CHAPTER I
OF THE HISTORY OF
TOMMY ATOP
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THE

THUNDERSTORM, &c.

IN the parish of Stokes-Newton, lived Mrs Watson. In the course of fifteen months she lost a husband and two children; one son, however, was spared to her prayers, who, she fondly hoped, would prove the comfort of her declining years. Mrs. Watson, through various misfortunes, was reduced to very narrow circumstances, yet she was never heard to complain; she turned all her thoughts to bring up her child in the fear and favour of God. But being of a tender spirit, she often wanted power to chastise her son as severely as his faults demanded; for Tom was a boy of a sullen and stubborn nature, and had the art of concealing these vices from his mother, which often proved very troublesome to his neighbours. Tom was about twelve years old, when a relation of his mother's died, and left her a small estate, with a legacy to Tom, who was his godson, of 200l. to fit him out in business, when he should be of proper age. Mrs. Watson felt not the least pride of heart, as many people

are apt to do, who unexpectedly acquire riches, yet felt great thankfulness, since she should now be enabled to assist many of her poor neighbours, whose wants she had often seen with an aching heart when she had it not in her power to relieve them. But Tom's vanity was highly gratified on the occasion; and he hoped his mother would take a new house in another part of the country, and live away a little.

“ Why, Tom,” said this good woman, “ do you wish I should quit my humble dwelling, since it is clean, comfortable, and convenient? I am not ashamed my neighbours should recollect that I have known great distresses, since there is no shame in poverty, provided our own extravagance does not bring it upon us.” Mrs. Watson was now desirous to give her son the best education in her power; but Tom had been so long used to indulgence at home, that he hated his school; and as his mother could have no influence over him, it was not likely that his master should; neither reason nor correction could soften Tom's sulky temper. He had made an acquaintance with a wicked unprincipled boy, who was articled to an attorney. Tom now resolved on studying the law likewise: this unwise determination of Tom was a great affliction to his mother; who, in spite of her fondness for him, had sufficient judgment to know, that neither his education or his understanding fitted him for such a profession; but the more Tom saw his present scheme was displeasing to his mother, the more it made him resolve to put it in execution. Mrs. Watson finding she could not controul her son's inclinations, now thought it her duty, however, to give him the best advice in her

power; and when he came to take leave of her, on his going to settle with his master, she spoke to him as follows :

“ My dear child, you are now going to enter upon a world wherein much evil abounds: let me beg you often to reflect upon your affectionate mother’s advice. In every situation, my son, you will find yourself beset with strong and powerful temptations, which you can only resist by daily prayer to God for his grace to strengthen you, for of yourself you can do nothing. Let me warn you to make no friends with a bad man, since “evil communication corrupt good manners.” Render evil for evil to no man. Make it your constant endeavour to fear God and keep his commandments; then should evil reports go forth against you, it will be your support that you have done nothing to deserve them. Be ever faithful to your employers, as long as their commands are lawful; and ever bear in mind that you have also a Master in heaven. Be ever watchful that the pleasures of the evening shall bear the reflection of the morning, so that you may cheerfully enter on the business of the day, without the blush of shame on your cheeks, or the sting of guilt in your heart.”

Tom for a short time appeared to pay attention to his good mother’s advice; but by falling into bad company some months after, the slight impression it had first made on him became fainter and fainter every day: he quite dropped his usual custom of going to church, having had bad books put into his hands, which had reasoned him out of the belief that there was either a heaven to reward, or a hell to punish. Tom greedily swallowed these perni-

cious doctrines, and at once gave himself up "to his own heart's lusts."

Although the study of the law had been Tom's own choice, he at length hated the profession, as he would have done any other which would have required his attention. His master treated him with great kindness, out of respect for his excellent mother, but Tom had no gratitude in his nature. He who fears not God, is not likely to be dutiful to his master.

It happened once, upon the fair-day, that some of Tom's young friends resolved to run a couple of ponies against each other. This much-talked-of race proved, as usual an interruption to all the business which was going on in the neighbourhood; to this race ran fathers of families, and mothers with babies in their arms, although they were certain of returning home supperless to bed at night, from having spent the day in idleness.

When the sport was over, the party met at a public house to sup, and talk over the pleasures of the day. Nothing but noise and confusion was to be heard. They eat, they drank, they swore, till at length, by excessive drinking, their brains seemed inflamed to madness. Tom was always very quarrelsome when he was very drunk; he gave the lie to one of his companions, which roused the resentment of all the rest: a violent altercation now arose among the parties: and such a scene of riot ensued, that the landlord quietly slipped off, and procured a constable, who secured the ring-leaders, and lodged them, for that night, in the lock-up house in the town. The next morning Tom, being restored to his sober senses, began to

feel the sad effects of his last night's frolic, and much of his tender mother's advice then returned to his recollection. But Tom's good thoughts were soon interrupted by the arrival of the constable, in order to conduct him and the rest of his black-eyed and bloody-nosed companions before the magistrate, who bound the parties over to their future good behaviour: and released them, on their paying the landlord for the damage done to his house and furniture, besides a fine of three guineas each for the poor of the several parishes in which they resided; the justice concluded the whole of the business by saying, that transferring the money of the offenders to the poor, was the only method he could devise to bring good out of evil.

Tom's pride was now mortified to the quick, well knowing he could not command a shilling without making application to his mother; with great difficulty she advanced the money, with the sad comfort that the poor were to receive the benefit of her son's frolic, and he only the shame.

Tom's outward shew of penitence, for some time, fairly took in his acquaintance; but Mrs. Watson knew her son's character too well to be deceived by appearances; she mourned inwardly and prayed fervently.

When Tom's clerkship was expired, he set up business for himself; but he had profited so little under his late master's instructions, and his profligate character was so well known, that few people chose to trust their affairs in his hands, by which means he rarely got a client, except one whose cause was too bad for an attorney, who had the least reputation, to take in hand. Although

Tom's business came in very slowly, yet he practised every sort of low dirty cunning to obtain it; but he gained little, though he spent largely, till at length his debts became so numerous, that he was threatened with an arrest. This made him resolve to try a last desperate experiment on his mother, which was to prevail on her to mortgage her estate to pay off his debts.

Tom, when he made this proposal to his mother, dreadfully, as prophane and loose people commonly do, called 'on God to witness' it should be the last time he would ever ask her for sixpence, adding, also, he hoped his future good behaviour would soon blot from her thoughts all remembrance of the past.

"Tom," answered this afflicted parent, "thy repentance never comes forward but when thy wants are pressing. No man's reformation can advance without a change of principle on his heart, of which thou hast hitherto given me no proofs.— If people cannot live on their estates, how are they to live without them? And as to raising a sum of money to relieve thy present distress, which thy own extravagance, not thy misfortunes, have brought upon thee, it is what I neither can or will do. No, Tom, whatever money I can save shall be applied to the maintenance of that wretched babe, whose mother thou didst basely abandon, after thou hadst made her the most solemn promise of marriage, for another young woman, whose parents could give her more money. O Tom! Tom! such crimes, sooner or later, must bring down the vengeance of Heaven on thy guilty head"

"Whatever may be my punishment," cried

he in a transport of rage, (for he was very drunk) "I hope you will not live to see it." Then giving her a blow on the side of her head, which brought her to the ground, he reeled off.

Mrs. Watson would willingly have kept her son's unnatural behaviour a secret, but her servant maid seeing what had happened, ran and called in the neighbours, who were grievously afflicted when they saw so good a woman in the state above described. As she had been long in a very ill state of health, her present sorrow of heart wrought so rapidly upon her, that at the end of a fortnight, her life was thought to be in great danger. Her kind neighbours, in turn, attended her day and night; and happy were they now to have it in their power to render her that assistance which they had experienced at her hand when under afflictions themselves.

"Your tender pity, my kind neighbours," said she to some of them, who were sitting round her bed, "is a great comfort to me in this my hour of trial. I feel I shall not long survive the shock;—that very son, in whom I placed all my hopes of happiness, by his cruelty and unkindness sends me to the grave with a broken heart. Heaven is pleased to chastise me for having set my affections, to the degree I did, upon any earthly object. When my son has been sick how have I blindly thought every worldly affliction would be light to that of losing him. When but a child, he saw my ungoverned love for him, by which means I soon lost all authority over him. I have long seen, with anguish of spirit, the fatal effects of my indulgence; and whilst I confess my weakness to you, my friends, I acknowledge

the tender mercies of Heaven towards me; for had no secret grief destroyed my hopes, at the very moment when I abounded with all the good and pleasant things of this world, I might have grown slack in my endeavours towards obtaining a better, therefore I can only say, it is well for me I have been afflicted. While I doated on my son, and looked to him for happiness, I almost forgot my Saviour, but my merciful Father has brought back my wandering heart to himself, by disappointing me in the object of my vain hope. I have lost my son, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.'

Here Mrs. Watson grew so faint she could not proceed. It will now be necessary to report what befel Tom Watson: on quitting his mother he galloped away to beg shelter of an acquaintance, who lived some miles off. Tom had now no hope of preventing the arrest, but by marrying the girl out of hand in spite of her parents; although he knew such a breach of duty in their only child, would go well-nigh to break their hearts. They had been heaping up riches for her, which she was now resolved to throw away upon a worthless fellow.— But Tom was resolved on carrying his point with the daughter; for still he did not doubt but the old folks would come down with the cash, when the thing was done, and could not be helped. These golden thoughts made's Tom's confinement sit easier upon him than it would otherwise have done.—“Money,” he would say, “was the very life, and soul, and spirit, of every thing, then money must be had at any rate; a short life and a merry one is my notion of the thing; and drink and drive

care away, shall be my toast, so I am resolved to keep it up as long as I can. 'Tis true, I can't promise myself much happiness with the woman I am about to marry, for a disobedient daughter will never make a good wife: well, no matter; for if once I get her fortune into my possession, I can make friends and find pleasure wherever I please." Tom had no sooner settled all his plans with the young woman, than he set forth to meet her; her father living within a mile of Stokes Newton, from whence they proposed to set off, and get married the following morning. Tom, full of the joyous expectation of soon meeting his intended wife, arrived at Stokes-Newton church-yard, about eleven o'clock. The night was exceedingly hot and sultry, and the sky seemed to threaten an approaching tempest. Tom sat himself down on a tomb-stone to rest.—“Mercy on me! Mercy on me!” cried he; “it looks as dark as if the end of all things were approaching; and am I fit to die? Even whilst I am sitting here on the grave of the dead, I am plotting evil against the living. How I tremble! But hold, I must not talk of dying with such golden prospects as I have before me.” Here a loud clap of thunder was succeeded by quick flashes of lightening. “Why should I be thus alarmed?” cried Tom. “Yet when the terrors of the Almighty threaten, the stoutest hearts will shake. O, for mercy! with what violence the storm rages; I will pursue the scheme no further, but go back, and marry the other young woman to whom I am bound by the most solemn promise.” A few minutes after Tom had taken this good resolution, the sky seemed to

brighten, and his good resolutions vanished of course. "I am now quite my own man again," cried he; "how could I be such a fool as to be so frightened at a little thunder and lightening? I will now pursue my journey." Then starting up, he was about to depart, but sunk down again almost breathless with apprehension; a flash of lightning passing over his eyes, for a time, made him nearly blind. "O my poor mother!" exclaimed Tom, now quite conscience struck, "I wish I had your forgiveness. I now remember the text says, "that "whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp "shall be put out in obscure darkness!" What a dreadful sentence is that! Suppose to-morrow morning I was to go and humble myself before her: I have often heard her say, that tears of repentance on a sinner's cheek, are more becoming than crowns of gold upon a sinner's head.—The wise King Solomon says "make not too much "haste to be rich, my son." Now, what an act of injustice am I about to commit, in order to obtain riches? Why, I shall perjure myself in the sight of God, in marrying one woman, when my most solemn promise was given to another!"—Whilst these thoughts were passing in Tom's mind, the rage of the tempest seemed to have spent itself; and the moment things began to wear a brighter aspect, Tom's repentance again vanished, and again he rose, sincerely resolved to pursue his journey, and laughing at his own superstitious fears. But at once a violent gust of wind, accompanied by thunder, split a large elm in two, not far from him; at the same time a screech-owl fled from the hollow of the yew tree under which he had sheltered himself; his troubled conscience made him conclude it was the fatal

messenger of death; and he was making off as fast as possible, when, looking about him, he perceived nothing. " Ah! how true it is," cried he, " that the wicked flee when no man pursueth. I fear to go, yet dread to stay. What a coward is a bad man, when the wrath of God is about to fall on him? And what a coward am I thus to give way to childish fear? How shall I despise myself for them tomorrow when the sun shines upon me. After all, 'tis nothing but a thunderstorm, so common at this season of the year. My spirits begin to rally again; adieu then to all fear. I'll on, faint heart ne'er won a fair lady." Tom had not proceeded many steps, after having formed these courageous resolutions, when the moon again suddenly dipping behind a cloud, all nature seemed wrapped in total darkness, till the quick return of lightening, followed by a most tremendous clap of thunder, made him now fancy the moment was arrived, when the earth and the sea were to render up their dead, and the just with the unjust were to stand at the judgment-seat of Christ. As Tom was hastening by the church-door he fancied he saw a light and heard a noise within the church. Terror struck, he screamed aloud. At that instant, old Jacob Rawton, the sexton, came out of the church followed by a boy carrying a lanthorn. Jacob on seeing who it was, asked Tom what had occasioned him to scream so loud? to which he replied, that on seeing a light in the church, at such a time of night, he had been as much terrified, as if he had seen a ghost,

" You may rest assured, Mr. Watson," answered Jacob, " that when once the soul has tasted of the blessedness of heavenly things, it will never journey

back again to this bad world; but some people, Mr. Watson, are apt to fancy they see and hear things quite out of nature, when fear holds up the candle of truth to their consciences."

Here Tom told Jacob the various conflicts which had passed in his mind since he had been detained in the church-yard. He then asked Jacob what had kept him to so late an hour in the church? Jacob replied, he had a funeral late in the evening.—“And what brings you here, Master Watson?”—Tom said, during his fright he had resolved to go and say his prayers on his father's grave, and ask Heaven to forgive his sins. “As we must pass that way,” answered Jacob, “you may fulfil your intention; you have much cause for prayer, and repentance also, Mr. Watson.”—Being arrived at the grave, Tom asked the occasion of all the loose rubbish he saw about it? “Because, thou undutiful young man,” said Jacob, “the precious remains of thy honoured mother were buried in that grave not more than two hours ago; and what, I hope, will sting thy guilty soul, the neighbours report that thy brutal behaviour towards her hastened her death.”

Terror for a while rendered Tom speechless.—At length, after fetching a deep groan, and during the most tremendous clap of thunder that ever was heard, he uttered these words:—“O my mother! to what corner of the world shall your guilty son fly to escape the threatened vengeance which the Almighty has denounced against disobedient and rebellious children? From God I can expect no mercy, from man no pity. O Lord suspend thy wrathful displeasure but for a moment—but whilst I say one prayer—O Lord, prepare my unprepared heart——.” At that instant a clap

of thunder struck him; he dropped down dead on the grave; and his body scorched by lightening, became a shocking spectacle, to the great dismay of Jacob and his son.

This surprising story flew about like wild fire; and people flocked from all parts to view the spot whereon the wrath of Heaven had poured its sudden vengeance on the undutiful child. The following Sunday has been appointed for preaching Mrs. Watson's funeral sermon; it was the day appointed for her son's burial.

The corpse of Tom Watson was brought into church just as the Rev. Mr. Morgan had named the text; the words were, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." In this sermon Mr. Morgan made it less his aim to praise the dead than to exhort the living; "although Mrs. Watson's character, (he said) had been a truly christian one, since to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with her God, by the assistance of his grace, had been her daily endeavor.———After this, Mr. Morgan addressed the younger part of the congregation in the following words:

"Behold, ye young men, (said he, pointing to the corpse) behold, I say, how suddenly you may be cut off from the land of the living, even in the very blossom of your iniquity; your bright day be turned into night eternal, and your joyful merry-makings into weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Attend now, ye youth, to the sudden destruction which brought down this young man, whilst running the wild race of sin, and be ye timely warned by his example. That profane tongue which so lately cursed his mother, and blasphemed his God, shall now be heard no more.

That rash hand of his, which so lately smote his venerable parent, was burnt almost to a cinder by a sudden flash of lightening from Heaven. And again," proceeded Mr. Morgan, pointing with his finger to the bier, whereon the body lay, "there lies the ill-fated youth, wrapped in a winding-sheet, who hoped, ere this, to have become a happy bride-groom."

Mr. Morgan afterwards, at the request of many friends, wrote the following

EPITAPH:

" Here, by red light'ning struck to earth,

" The bold blasphemer lies,

" That mother smote, who gave him birth,

" And on *her* grave *he* dies.

" Ye children all, who view this sod,

" Betimes learn well this truth:

" To *honour* parents, love your God,

" Now in your days of youth."

THE END.