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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NEARLY LOST BUT DEARLY WON ***

Rev Theodore P Wilson

"Nearly Lost but Dearly Won"

Chapter One.

Esau Tankardew.

Certainly, Mr Tankardew was not a pattern of cleanliness, either in his house or his person. Someone had said of him sarcastically, "that there was nothing clean in his house but his *towels*;" and there was a great deal of truth in the remark. He seemed to dwell in an element of cobwebs; the atmosphere in which he lived, rather than breathed, was apparently a mixture of fog and dust. Everything he had on was faded—everything that he had about him was faded—the only dew that seemed to visit the jaded-looking shrubs in the approach to his dwelling was *mil/dew*. Dilapidation and dinginess went hand-in-hand everywhere: the railings round the house were dilapidated—some had lost their points, others came to an abrupt conclusion a few inches above the stone-work from which they sprang; the steps were dilapidated—one of them rocked as you set your foot upon it, and the others sloped inwards so as to hold treacherous puddles in wet weather to entrap unwary visitors; the entrance hall was dilapidated; if ever there had been a pattern to the paper, it had now retired out of sight and given place to irregular stains, which looked something like a vast map of a desolate country, all moors and swamps; the doors were dilapidated, fitting so badly, that when the front door opened a sympathetic clatter of all the lesser ones rang through the house; the floors were dilapidated, and afforded ample convenience for easy egress and ingress to the flourishing colonies of rats and mice which had established themselves on the premises; and above all, Mr Tankardew himself was dilapidated in his dress, and in his whole appearance and habits—his very voice was dilapidated, and his words slipshod and slovenly.

And yet Mr Tankardew was a man of education and a gentleman, and you knew it before you had been five minutes in his company. He was the owner of the house he lived in, on the outskirts of the small town of Hopeworth, and also of considerable property in the neighbourhood. Amongst other possessions, he was the landlord of two houses of some pretensions, a little out in the country, which were prettily situated in the midst of shrubberies and orchards. In one of these houses lived a Mr Rothwell, a gentleman of independent means; in the other a Mrs Franklin, the widow of an officer, with her daughter Mary, now about fifteen years of age.

Mr Tankardew had settled in his present residence some ten years since. *Why* he bought it nobody knew, nor was likely to know; all that people were sure of was that he *had* bought it, and pretty cheap too, for it was not a house likely to attract any one who appreciated comfort or liveliness; moreover, current report said that it was haunted. Still, it was for sale, and it passed somehow or other into Mr Tankardew's hands, and Mr Tankardew's hands and whole person passed into *it*; and here he was now with his one old servant, Molly Gilders, a shade more dingy and dilapidated than himself. Several persons put questions to Molly about her master, but found it a very discouraging business, so they gave up the attempt as hopeless, and it remained an unexplained mystery why Mr Tankardew came to Hopeworth, and where he came from. As for questioning the old gentleman himself, no one had the hardihood to undertake it; and indeed he gave them little opportunity, as he very rarely showed his face out of his own door; so rumour had to say what it pleased, and among other things, rumour said that the old dressing-gown in which he was ordinarily seen was never off duty, either day or night.

Mr Tankardew employed no agent, but collected his own rents; which he required to be paid to himself half-yearly, in the beginning of January and July, at his own residence.

It was on one crisp, frosty, cheery January morning that Mr Rothwell, and his son Mark, a young lad of eighteen, were ushered into Mr Tankardew's sitting-room; if that could be properly called a sitting-room, in which nobody seemed ever to sit, to judge by the deep unruffled coating of dust which reposed on every article, the chairs included. Respect for their own garments caused father and son to stand while they waited for their landlord; but, before he made his appearance, two more visitors were introduced, or rather let into the room by old Molly, who, considering her duty done when she had given them an entrance into the apartment, never troubled herself as to their further comfort and accommodation.

A strange contrast were these visitors to the old room and its furniture. Mr Rothwell was a tall and rather portly man with a pleasant countenance, a little flushed, indicating a somewhat free indulgence in what is certainly miscalled "good living." The cast of his features was that of a person easy-going, good-tempered, and happy; but a line or two of care here and there, and an occasional wrinkling up of the forehead showed that the surface was not to be trusted. Mark, his son, was like him, and the very picture of good humour and light-heartedness; so buoyant, indeed, that at times he seemed indebted to spirits something more than "animal." But the brightness had not yet had any of the gilding rubbed off—everyone liked him, no one could be dull where he was. Mrs Franklin, how sweet and lovable her gentle face! You could tell that, whatever she might have lost, she had gained grace—a glow from the Better Land gave her a heavenly cheerfulness. And Mary—she had all her mother's sweetness without the shadow from past sorrows, and her laugh was as bright and joyous as the sunlit ripple on a lake in summer time.

The Rothwells and Franklins, as old friends, exchanged a hearty but whispered greeting.

"I daren't speak out loud," said Mark to Mary, "for fear of raising the dust, for that'll set me sneezing, and then good-bye to one another; for the first sneeze 'll raise such a cloud that we shall never see each other till we get out of doors again."

"O Mark, don't be foolish! You'll make me laugh, and we shall offend poor Mr Tankardew; but it is very odd. I never was here before, but mamma wished me to come with her, as a sort of protection, for she's half afraid of the old gentleman."

"Your first visit to our landlord, I think?" said Mr Rothwell.

"Yes," replied Mrs Franklin. "I sent my last half-year's rent by Thomas, but as there are some little alterations I want doing at the house, and Mr Tankardew, I'm told, will never listen to anything on this subject second-hand, I have come myself and brought Mary with me."

"Just exactly my own case," said Mr Rothwell; "and Mark has given me his company, just for the sake of the walk. I think you have never met our landlord?"

"No, never!—and I must confess that I feel considerably relieved that our interview will be less private than I had anticipated."

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr Tankardew himself. He was tall and very grey, with strongly-marked features, and deeply-furrowed cheeks and forehead. His eyes were piercing and restless, but there was a strange gentleness of expression about the mouth, which might lead one, when viewing his countenance as a whole, to gather that he was one who, though often deceived, *must* still trust and love. He had on slippers and worsted stockings, but neither of them were pairs. He wore an old black handkerchief with the tie half-way towards the back of his neck, while a very long and discoloured dressing-gown happily shrouded from view a considerable portion of his lower raiment.

The room in which he met his tenants was thoroughly in keeping with its owner: old and dignified, panelled in dark wood, with a curiously-carved chimneypiece, and a ceiling apparently adorned with some historical or allegorical painting, if you could only have seen it.

How Mr Tankardew got into the room on the present occasion was by no means clear, for nobody saw him enter.

Mark suggested to Mary, in a whisper, that he had come up through a trap door. At any rate he was there, and greeted his visitors without embarrassment.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," he muttered, "sorry to see you standing. Ah! Dusty, I see;" and with the long tail of his dressing-gown he proceeded to raise a cloud of dust from four massive oak chairs, much to the disturbance of Mark's equanimity, who succeeded with some difficulty in maintaining his gravity. "Sorry," added Mr Tankardew, "to appear in this *dishabille*, must excuse and take me as I am."

"Pray don't mention it," replied both his tenants, and then proceeded to business.

The rent had been paid and receipts duly given, when the old man raised his eyes and fixed them on Mary's face. She had been sitting back in the deep recess of a window, terribly afraid of a mirthful explosion from Mark, and therefore drawing herself as far out of sight as possible; but now a bright ray of sunshine cast itself full on her sweet, loving features, and as Mr Tankardew caught their expression he uttered a sudden exclamation, and stood for a moment as if transfixed to the spot. Mary felt and looked half-confused, half-frightened, but the next moment Mr Tankardew turned away, muttered something to himself, and then entered into the subject of requested alterations. His visitors had anticipated some probable difficulties, if not a refusal, on the part of their landlord; but to their surprise and satisfaction he promised at once to do all that they required: indeed he hardly seemed to take the matter in thoroughly, but to have his mind occupied with something quite foreign to the subject in hand. At last he said,—

"Well, well, get it all done—get it all done, Mr Rothwell, Mrs Franklin—get it all done, and send in the bills to me—there, there."

Again he fixed his eyes earnestly on Mary's face, then slowly withdrew



"STRIDING UP TO THE FIREPLACE HE OPENED A PANEL ABOVE IT, AND DISCLOSED AN EXQUISITE PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL."—P. 14.

them, and striding up to the fireplace opened a panel above it, and disclosed an exquisite portrait of a young girl about Mary's age. Nothing could be more striking than the contrast between the gloomy, dingy hue of the apartment, and the vivid colouring of the picture, which beamed out upon them like a rainbow spanning a storm-cloud. Then he closed the panel abruptly, and turned towards the company with a deep sigh.

"Ah! Well, well," he said, half aloud; "well, good-morning, good-morning; when shall we meet again?"

These last words were addressed to Mrs Franklin and her daughter.

"Really," replied the former, hardly knowing what to say, "I'm sure, I—"

Mr Rothwell came to the rescue.

"My dear sir, I'm sure I shall be very glad to see you at my house; you don't go into society much; it'll do you good to come out a little; you'll get rid of a few of the cobwebs—from your mind"—he added hastily, becoming painfully conscious that he was treading on rather tender ground when he was talking about cobwebs.

"Wouldn't Mr Tankardew like to come to our juvenile party on Twelfth Night?" asked Mark with a little dash of mischief in his voice, and a demure look at Mary.

Mrs Franklin bit her lips, and Mr Rothwell frowned.

"A juvenile party at your house?" asked Mr Tankardew, very gravely.

"Only my son's nonsense, you must pardon him," said Mr Rothwell; "we always have a young people's party that night, of course you would be heartily welcome, only—"

"A juvenile party?" asked Mr Tankardew again, very slowly.

"Yes, sir," replied Mark, for the sake of saying something, and feeling a little bit of a culprit; "twelfth cake, crackers, negus, lots of fun, something like a breaking-up at school. Miss Franklin will be there, and plenty more young people too."

"Something like a breaking-up," muttered the old man, "more like a breaking-down, I should think—I'll come."

The effect of this announcement was perfectly overwhelming. Mr Rothwell expressed his gratification with as much self-possession as he could command, and named the hour. Mrs Franklin checked an exclamation of astonishment with some difficulty. Poor Mary coughed her suppressed laughter into her handkerchief; but as for Mark, he was forced to beat a hasty retreat, and dashed down the stairs like a whirlwind.

The way home lay first down a narrow lane, into which they entered about a hundred yards from Mr Tankardew's house. Here the rest of the party found Mark behaving himself rather like a recently-escaped lunatic: he was jumping

up and down, then tossing his cap into the air, then leaning back on the bank, holding his sides, and every now and then crying out while the tears rolled over his cheeks.

"Oh dear! Oh dear! What *shall* I do? Old Tanky's coming to our juvenile party."

Chapter Two.

The Juvenile Party.

Let us look into two very different houses on the morning of January 6th.

Mr Rothwell's place is called "The Firs," from a belt of those trees which shelter the premises on the north.

All is activity at "The Firs" on Twelfth-day morning.

It is just noon, and Mrs Rothwell and her daughters are assembled in the drawing-room making elaborate preparations for the evening with holly, and artificial flowers and mottoes, and various cunning and beautiful devices. On a little table by the grand piano stands a tray with a decanter of sherry, a glass jug filled (and likely to remain so) with water, and a few biscuits. Mrs Rothwell is lying back in an elegant easy-chair, looking flushed and languid. Her three daughters, Jane, Florence, and Alice, are standing near her, all looking rather weary.

"What a bore these parties are!" exclaimed the eldest. "I'm sick to death of them. I shall be tired out before the evening begins."

"So shall I," chimes in her sister Florence. "I hate having to be civil to those odious little frights, the Graysons, and their cousins. Why can't they stay at home and knock one another's heads about in the nursery?"

"Very aimiable of you I must say, my dears," drawls out Mrs Rothwell. "Come, you must exert yourselves, you know it only comes once a year."

"Ay, once too often, mamma!"

"I'm sure," cries little Alice, "I shall enjoy the party very much: it'll be jolly, as Mark says, only I wish I wasn't so tired just now: ah! Dear me!"

"Oh! Child, don't yawn!" says her mother; "you'll make me more fatigued than I am, and I'm quite sinking now. Jane, do just pour me out another glass of sherry. Thank you, I can sip a little as I want it. Take some yourself, my dear, it'll do you good."

"And me too, mamma," cries Alice, stretching out her hand.

"Really, Alice, you're too young; you mustn't be getting into wanting wine so early in the day, it'll spoil your digestion."

"Oh! Nonsense, mamma! Everybody takes it now; it'll do me good, you'll see. Mark often gives me wine; he's a dear good brother is Mark."

Mrs Rothwell sighs, and takes a sip of sherry: she is beginning to brighten up.

"What in the world did your father mean by asking old Mr Tankardew to the party to-night?" she exclaims, turning to her elder daughters.

"Mean! Mamma—you may well ask that: the old scarecrow! They say he looks like a bag of dust and rags."

"Mark says," cries her sister, "that he's just the image of a stuffed Guy Fawkes, which the boys used to carry about London on a chair."

"Well, my dears, we must make the best of matters, we can't help it now."

"Oh! I daresay it'll be capital fun," exclaims Alice; "I shall like to see Mark doing the polite to 'Old Tanky,' as he calls him."

"Come, Miss Pert, you must mind your behaviour," says Florence; "remember, Mr Tankardew is a gentleman and an old man."

"Indeed, Miss Gravity, but I'm not going to learn manners of you; mamma pays Miss Craven to teach me that, so good-bye;" and the child, with a mocking courtesy towards her sister, runs out of the room laughing.

And now let us look into the breakfast-room of "The Shrubbery," as Mrs Franklin's house is called.

Mary and her mother are sitting together, the former adding some little adornments to her evening dress, and the latter knitting.

"Don't you like Mark Rothwell, mamma?"

"No, my child."

"Oh! Mamma! What a cruelly direct answer!"

"Shouldn't I speak the direct truth, Mary?"

"Oh! Yes, certainly the truth, only you might have softened it off a little, because I think you must like some things in him."

"Yes, he is cheerful and good-tempered."

"And obliging, mamma?"

"I'm not so sure of that, Mary; self-indulgent people are commonly selfish people, and selfish people are seldom obliging: a really obliging person is one who will cross his own inclination to gratify yours, without having any selfish end in view."

"And you don't think Mark would do this, mamma?"

"I almost think not. I like to see a person obliging from principle, and not merely from impulse: not merely when his being obliging is only another form of self-gratification."

"But why should not Mark Rothwell be obliging on principle?"

"Well, Mary, you know my views. I can trust a person as truly obliging who acts on Christian principle, who follows the rule, 'Look not everyone on his own things, but everyone also on the things of others,' because he loves Christ. I am afraid poor Mark has never learned to love Christ."

Mary sighs, and her mother looks anxiously at her.

"My dearest child," she says, earnestly, "I don't want you to get too intimate with the young Rothwells. I am sure they are not such companions as your own heart would approve of."

"Why, no, mamma, I can't say I admire the way in which they have been brought up."

"Admire it! Oh! Mary, this is one of the crying sins of the day. I mean the utter selfishness and self-indulgence in which so many young people are educated; they must eat, they must drink, they must talk just like their elders; they acknowledge no betters, they spurn all authority; the holy rule, 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right,' is quite out of date with too many of them now."

"I fear it is so, mamma. I don't like the girls much at 'The Firs,' but I cannot help liking Mark; I mean," she added, colouring, "as a light-hearted, generous, pleasant boy." A silence of a few moments, and then she looks up and says, timidly and lovingly, "If you think it better, dearest mamma, I won't go to the party to-night."

"No, Mary, I would not advise that; I shall be with you, and I should like you to see and judge for yourself. I have every confidence in you. I do believe that you love your Saviour, and loving Him, I feel sure that you will not knowingly enter into any very intimate acquaintance with any one who has not the same hope; without which hope, my precious child, there may be much amiability and attractiveness, but can be no solid and abiding happiness or peace."

Mary's reply is a child's earnest embrace and a whispered assurance of unchanging love to her mother, and trust in her judgment.

Six o'clock.—Both drawing-rooms at "The Firs" were thrown into one, and brilliantly lighted up. Mysterious sounds in the dining-room below told of preparations for that part of the evening's proceedings, by no means the least gratifying to the members of a juvenile party. Friends began to assemble: young boys and girls in shoals, the former dazzling in neckties and pins, the latter in brooches and earrings: with a sprinkling of seniors. The host, hostess, and her daughters were all smiles; the last-named especially, unable, indeed, to give expression to their satisfaction at having the happiness of receiving their dear young friends. Mark was there, of course, full of fun, and really enjoying himself, the life and soul of everything.

And now, when Mrs Franklin and Mary had just taken their seats and had begun to look around them, the door was thrown widely open, and the servant announced in a loud voice, "Mr Esau Tankardew!"

Every sound was instantly hushed, every head bent forward, every mouth parted in breathless expectation. Mark crept close up to Mary and squeezed his white gloves into ropes; the next moment Mr Tankardew entered.

Marvellous transformation! The faded garments had entirely disappeared. Was this the man of dilapidation? Yes, it was Mr Tankardew. He was habited in a suit of black, which, though not new, had evidently not seen much service; his trousers ceased at the knee, leaving his silk stockings and shoes conspicuous. No reproach could be cast on the purity of his white neckcloth, nor on the general cleanliness of his person. His greeting of the host and hostess, though a little old-fashioned, was thoroughly easy and courteous, after which he begged them to leave him to himself, and to give their undivided attention to the young, whose special evening it was. Curiosity once gratified, the suspended buzz of eager talk broke out again, and allowed Mr Tankardew to make his way to Mrs Franklin and her daughter. These he saluted very heartily, and added, "Let an old man sit by you awhile, and watch the proceedings of the young people, and realise if he possibly can that he was once young himself—ah yes! Once young," and he sighed deeply.

Fun and frolic were soon at their height. Merry music struck up, and the larger of the two drawing-rooms was cleared for a dance. Mark hurried up to Mary. "Come, Mary," he cried, "I want you for a partner; we shall have capital fun;

come along.”

“Thank you,” she replied; “I prefer to watch the others—at present, at any rate.”

“Oh! Nonsense! You *must* come, there’ll be no fun without you; it’s very hot though, but there’ll be lots of negus presently.”

“Mary will do her part by trying to amuse some of the very little ones,” said her mother; “I think that will be more to her taste.”

“Oh! Yes, dear mamma, that it will. Thank you, Mark, all the same.”

“Good, very good, very good,” cried Mr Tankardew, in a low voice, and beating one hand gently on the other; “keep to that, my child, keep to that.”

Mark retired with a very bad grace, and Mary, slipping away from her mother’s side, gathered a company around her of the tinier sort, with glowing cheeks and very wide eyes, who were rather scared by the more boisterous proceedings of those somewhat older; she amused them in a quiet way, raising many a little happy laugh, and fairly winning their hearts.

“God bless her,” muttered Mr Tankardew, when he had watched her for some time very attentively; “very good, that will do, very good indeed; keep her to it, Mrs Franklin, keep her to it.”

“She’s a dear, good child,” said her mother.

“Very true, madam; yes, dear and good; some are dear and bad—dear at any price. I see some now.”

Wine and negus were soon handed round; the tray was presented to Mary. Mr Tankardew lent forward and bent a piercing look at her. She declined, not at all knowing that he was watching her.

“Good again; very good, good girl, wise girl, prudent girl,” he murmured to himself.

The tray now came to Mrs Franklin. She took a glass of sherry. Mr Tankardew’s brow clouded. “Ah!” he exclaimed, and moved restlessly on his chair. The servant then approached him and offered the contents of the tray, but he waved it off with an imperious gesture of his hand, and did not vouchsafe a word.

The more boisterous party in the other room now became conscious of the presence of the wine and negus, and rushed in, surrounding the maid who was bringing in a fresh supply. Mark was at the head of them, and tossed down two glasses in rapid succession. The rest clamoured for the strong drink with eager hands and outstretched arms. “Give me some, give me some,” was uttered on all sides. Self reigned paramount.

Mr Tankardew’s tall form rose high above the edge of the struggling crowd, which he had approached.

“Poor things, poor things, poor things!” he said gloomily.

“A pleasant sight, these little ones enjoying themselves,” said Mr Rothwell, coming up.

Mr Tankardew seemed scarcely to hear him, and returned to his place by Mrs Franklin.

“Enjoying themselves!” he exclaimed, in an undertone, “call it pampering the flesh, killing the soul, and courting the devil.”

“Rather hard upon the poor dear children,” laughingly remarked a lady, who overheard him: “why, surely you wouldn’t deny *them*, their share of the enjoyment of God’s good creatures?”

“God’s good creatures, madam! Are the wine and negus God’s good creatures?”

“Certainly they are,” was the reply: “God has permitted man to manufacture them out of the fruits of the earth, and to make them the means of pleasurable excitement, and therefore surely we may take them and give them as His good creatures.”

Mr Tankardew made no answer, but striding up to Mary, where she sat with a circle of little interesting faces round her, eagerly intent on some simple story she was telling them, he said, “Miss Franklin, will you favour me by bringing me a few of your young friends here. There, now, my dear,” (speaking to one of the little girls), “just hand me that empty negus glass.” The child did so, and Mr Tankardew, producing from his coat pocket a considerable sized bottle, turned to the lady who had addressed him, and said:

“Madam, will you help me to dispense some of the contents of this bottle to these little children?”

“Gladly,” she replied. “I suppose it is something very good, such as little folks like.”

“It is one of God’s good creatures, madam:” saying which, he turned



"HE TURNED TOWARDS THE OTHER'S ASTONISHED GAZE THE BROAD LABEL ON WHICH WAS PRINTED IN GREAT BLACK LETTERS, LAUDANUM—POISON."—p. 28.

towards the other's astonished gaze the broad label on which was printed in great black letters, "Laudanum—Poison."

"My dear sir, what do you mean?"

"I mean, madam, that the liquid in this bottle is made from the poppy, which is one of the fruits of the earth; therefore it is one of God's good creatures, just as the wine and negus are. It produces very pleasurable sensations, too, if you take it, just as *they* do; therefore it is right to indulge in it, and give it to others, just as it is right for the same reasons to indulge in wine and negus and spirits, and to give them to others."

"I really don't understand you, sir."

"Don't you, madam? I think you won't be able to pick a hole in my argument."

"Ah! But this liquid is poison!"

"So is alcohol, madam, only it is not labelled so: more's the pity, for it has killed thousands and tens of thousands, where laudanum has only killed units. There, my child," he added, turning to Mary, and taking an elegant little packet from his pocket, "give these *bonbons* to the little ones. I didn't mean to disappoint them."

While this dialogue was going on, the rest of the party was too full of noisy mirth to notice what was passing. Mark's voice was getting very wild and conspicuous; and now he made his way with flushed face and sparkling eyes to Mary, who was sitting quietly between her mother and Mr Tankardew. He carried a jug in one hand, and a glass in the other, and, without noticing the elder people, exclaimed, "It is an hour yet to supper time, and you'll be dead with thirst; I am sure I am. You must take some of this, it is capital stuff; our butler made it: I have just had a tumbler—it is punch. Come, Mary, you must," and he thrust the glass into her hand: "you must, I say; you shall; never mind old Tanky," he added, in what he meant to be a whisper. Then he raised the jug with unsteady fingers, but, before a drop could reach the tumbler, Mr Tankardew had risen, and with one sweep of his hand dashed it out of Mary's grasp on the ground. Few heard the crash, amidst the din of the general merriment, and those who noticed it supposed it to be an accident. "Nearly lost!" whispered Mr Tankardew in Mary's ear; then he said, in a louder voice, "Faugh! The atmosphere of this place does not suit me. I must retire. Mrs Franklin, pray make an old man's excuses to our host and hostess."

He was *gone*!

Chapter Three.

The Swollen Stream.

It is the morning after the juvenile party at "The Firs." A clear, bright frost still: everything *outside* the house fresh and vigorous: half-a-dozen labourers' little children running to school with faces like peonies; jumping, racing, sliding, puffing out clouds of steaming breath as they shout out again and again for very excess of health and spirits.

Everything *inside* the house limp, languid, and lugubrious; the fires are sulky and won't burn; the maids are sulkier still. Mr Rothwell breakfasts alone, feeling warm in nothing but his temper: the grate sends forth little white jets of smoke from a wall of black coal, instead of presenting a cheery surface of glowing heat: the toast is black at the corners and white in the middle: the eggs look so truly new laid that they seem to have come at once from the henhouse to the table, without passing through the saucepan: the coffee is feeble and the milk smoked: the news in the daily papers is flat, and the state of affairs in country and county peculiarly depressing. Upstairs, Mrs Rothwell tosses about with a sick headache, unable to rest and unwilling to rise. The young ladies are dawdling in dressing-gowns over a bedroom breakfast, and exchanging mutual sarcasms and recriminations, blended with gall and bitterness flung back on last night's party. Poor Mark has the worst of it, nausea and splitting headache, with a shameful sense of having made both a fool and a beast of himself. So much for the delights of "lots of negus, wine, and punch!" He has also a humbling remembrance of having been rude to Mr Tankardew. A knock at his door. "Come in."

"Please, sir, there's a hamper come for you," says the butler; "shall I bring it in?"

"Yes, if you like."

The hamper is brought in and opened; it is only a small one. In the midst of a deep bed of straw lies a hard substance; it is taken out and the paper wrapped round it unfolded; only a glass tumbler! There is a paper in it on which is written, "To Mr Mark Rothwell, from Mr Esau Tankardew, to replace what he broke last night: keep it empty, my boy; keep it empty."

Nine o'clock at "The Shrubbery." Mary and her mother are seated at breakfast, both a little dull and disinclined to speak. At last Mary breaks the silence by a profound sigh. Mrs Franklin smiles, and says:

"You seem rather burdened with care, my child."

"Well, I don't know, dear mamma; I don't think it is exactly care, but I'm dissatisfied or disappointed that I don't feel happier for last night's party."

"You don't think there was much real enjoyment in it?"

"Not to *me*, mamma; and I don't imagine very much to anybody—except, perhaps, to some of the very little ones. There was a hollowness and emptiness about the whole thing; plenty of excitement and a great deal of selfishness, but nothing to make me feel really brighter and happier."

"No, my child; I quite agree with you: and I was specially sorry for old Mr Tankardew. I can't quite understand what induced him to come: his conduct was very strange, and yet there is something very amiable about him in the midst of his eccentricities."

"What a horror he seems to have of wine and negus and suchlike things, mamma."

"Yes; and I'm sure what he saw last night would not make him any fonder of them. Poor Mark Rothwell quite forgot himself. I was truly glad to get away early."

"Oh! So was I, mamma; it was terrible. I wish he wouldn't touch such things; I'm sure he'll do himself harm if he does."

"Yes, indeed, Mary; harm in body, and character, and soul. Those are fearful words, 'No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God.'"

"I wish I was like Mr Tankardew," says Mary, after a pause; "did you see, mamma, how he refused the negus? I never saw such a frown."

"Well, Mary, I'm not certain that total abstinence would suit either of us, but it is better to be on the safe side. I am sure, in these days of special self-indulgence, it would be worth a little sacrifice if our example might do good; but I'll think about it."

It was a lovely morning in the September after the juvenile party, one of those mornings which combine the glow of summer with the richness of autumn. A picnic had been arranged to a celebrated hill about ten miles distant from Hopeworth. The Rothwells had been the originators, and had pressed Mary Franklin to join the party. Mrs Franklin had at first declined for her daughter. She increasingly dreaded any intimacy between her and Mark, whose habits she feared were getting more and more self-indulgent; and Mary herself was by no means anxious to go, but Mark's father had been particularly pressing on the subject, more so than Mrs Franklin could exactly understand, so she yielded to the joint importunity of father and son, though with much reluctance. Mary had seen Mark occasionally since the night of the 6th of January, and still liked him, without a thought of going beyond this; but she was grieved to see how strongly her mother felt against him, and was inclined to think her a little hard. True, he had been betrayed into an excess on Twelfth night; but, then, he was no drunkard. So she argued to herself, and so too many argue; but how strange it is that people should argue so differently about the sin of drunkenness from what they argue about other sins! If a man lies to us *now and then*, do we call him *habitually* truthful? If a man steals *now and then*, do we call him *habitually* honest? Surely not; yet if a man is *only now and then* drunken, his fault is winked at; he is considered by many as *habitually* a sober man; and yet, assuredly, if there be one sin more than another which from the guilt and misery that it causes deserves little indulgence, it is the sin of drunkenness. Mary took the common view, and could not think of Mark as being otherwise than habitually sober, because he was only now and then the worse for strong drink.

It was, as we have said, a lovely September morning, and all the members of the picnic party were in high spirits. An

omnibus had been hired expressly for the occasion. Mark sat by the driver, and acted as presiding genius. The common meeting-place was an old oak, above a mile out of the town, and thither by ten o'clock all the providers and their provisions had made their way. No one could look more bright than Mark Rothwell, no one more peacefully lovely than Mary Franklin. All being seated, off they started at an uproarious signal from Mark. Away they went, along level road, through pebbly lane, its banks gorgeous with foxgloves and fragrant with honeysuckles, over wild heath, and then up grassy slopes. There were fourteen in the party: Mr Rothwell, Mark and his three sisters, and a lady neighbour; Mrs Franklin and her daughter, with a female friend; and five young gentlemen who were or seemed to be cousins, more or less, to everybody. Five miles were soon passed, and then the road was crossed by a little stream. Cautiously the lumbering vehicle made its way down the shelving gravel, plunged into the sparkling water, fouling it with thick eddies of liquid mud, and then, with some slight prancings on the part of the willing horses, gained the opposite bank. The other five miles were soon accomplished, all feeling the exhilarating effect of drinking in copious draughts of mountain air—God's pure and unadulterated stimulant to strengthen the nerves, string up the muscles, and clear the brain, free from every drop of spirit except the glowing spirit of health. And now the omnibus was abandoned by a little roadside inn to the care of a hostler, who took the horses (poor dumb brutes!) to feast on corn and water, God's truly "good creatures," unspoilt by the perverse hand of self-indulgent man!

The driver, with the rest of the party, toiled up the hill-side, and all, on gaining the summit, gazed with admiration across one of those lovely scenes which may well make us feel that the stamp of God's hand is there, however much man may have marred what his Creator has made: wood and lane, cornfields red-ripe, turnip fields in squares of dazzling green, were spread out before them in rich embroidery with belts of silver stream flashing like diamonds on the robe of beauty with which Almighty love had clothed the earth. Oh! To think that sin should defile so fair a prospect! Yet sin was there, though unseen by those delighted gazers. Ay, and thickly sown among those sweet hills and dales were drunkards' houses, where hearts were withering, and beings made for immortality were destroying body and soul by a lingering suicide.

An hour passed quickly by, and there came a summons to luncheon. Under a tall rock, affording an unbroken view of the magnificent landscape outspread below, the tablecloth was laid and secured at the corners by large stones. Pies both savoury and sweet were abundant, bread sufficient, salt scanty, and water absent altogether. Bottles were plentiful—bottles of ale, of porter, of wines heavy and light. Corks popped, champagne fizzed, ale sparkled. Mark surrendered the eatables into other hands, and threw his whole energies into the joint consumption and distribution of strong drink. He seemed in this matter, at least, to act upon the rule that "Example is better than precept": if he pressed others to drink, he led the way by taking copious draughts himself. The driver, too, was not forgotten; the poor man was getting a chance of rising a little above his daily plodding as he looked out on the lovely scenery before him: but he was not to be left to God's teachings; ale, porter, champagne, he must taste them all. Mark insisted on it; so the unfortunate man drank and drank, and then threw himself down among some heath to sleep off, if he could, the fumes of alcohol that were clouding his brains.

And what of Mrs Franklin and Mary? Both had declined all the stimulants, and had asked for water.

"Nonsense," cried Mark; "water! I've taken very good care that there shall be no water drunk to-day; you must take some wine or ale, you must indeed."

"We will manage without it, if you please," said Mrs Franklin quietly.

Mark pressed the intoxicants upon them even to rudeness, but without effect. Mr Rothwell was evidently annoyed at his son's pertinacity, and tried to check him; but all in vain, for Mark had taken so much as just to make him obstinate and unmanageable. But, finding that he could not prevail, the young man hurried away in anger, and plied the other members of the company with redoubled vigour.

So engrossing had been the luncheon that few of the party had noticed a sudden lull in the atmosphere, and an oppressive calm which had succeeded to the brisk and cheery breeze. But now, as Mary rose from her seat on the grass, she said to her mother:

"Oh, mamma, how close it has become! And look there in the distance: what a threatening bank of clouds! I fear we are going to have a storm."

"I fear so indeed, Mary; we must give our friends warning, and seek out a shelter."

All had now become conscious of the change. A stagnant heat brooded over everything; not a breath of wind; huge banks of magnificent storm-cloud came marching up majestically from the horizon, throwing out little jets of lightning, with solemn murmurs of thunder. Drop, drop, drop, tinkled on the gathered leaves, now quicker, now quicker, and thicker. Under a huge roof of overhanging rock the party cowered together. At last, down came the storm with a blast like a hurricane, and deluges of rain. On, on it poured relentlessly, with blinding lightning and deafening peals of thunder. Hour after hour! Would it never cease? At last a lull between four and five o'clock, and, as the tempest rolled murmuring away, the dispirited friends began their preparations for returning. Six o'clock before all had reached the inn. Where were the driver and Mark? Another tedious hour before they appeared, and each manifestly the worse for liquor. Past seven by the time they had fairly started. And now the clouds began to gather again. On they went, furiously at first, and then in unsteady jerks, the omnibus swaying strangely. It was getting dark, and the lowering clouds made it darker still. Not a word was spoken by the passengers, but each was secretly dreading the crossing of the stream. At last the bank was gained—but what a change! The little brook had become a torrent deep and strong.

"Oh! For goodness' sake, stop! Stop! Let us get out," screamed the Misses Rothwell.

"In with it! In with it!" roared Mark to the driver; "dash through like a trump."

"Tchuck, tchuck," was the half-drunken driver's reply, as he lashed his horses and urged them into the stream.



“DOWN THEY WENT; SPLASH! DASH! PLUNGE! THE WATER FOAMING AGAINST THE WHEELS LIKE A MILLSTREAM.”—p. 43.

wheels like a millstream. Screams burst from all the terrified ladies except Mary and her mother, who held each other's hand tightly. Mrs Franklin had taught her daughter presence of mind both by example and precept. But now the water rushed into the vehicle itself as the frightened horses struggled for the opposite bank. Mark's voice was now heard in curses, as he snatched the whip from the driver and scourged the poor bewildered horses. Another splash: the driver was gone: the poor animals pulled nobly. Crash! Jerk! Bang! A trace had snapped: another jerk, a fearful dashing and struggling, the omnibus was drawn half out of the water, and lay partly over on its side: then all was still except the wails and the shrieks of the ladies. Happily a lamp had been lighted and still burned in the omnibus, which was now above the full violence of the water. The door was opened and the passengers released; but by whom?—certainly not by Mark. A tall figure moved about in the dusk, and coming up to Mary threw a large cloak over her shoulders, for it was now raining heavily, and said in a voice whose tones she was sure she knew:

“Come with me, my child, your mother is close at hand; there, trust to me; take my other arm, Mrs Franklin: very fortunate I was at hand to help. The drink, the drink,” he muttered in a low voice; “if they'd stuck to the water at the beginning they wouldn't have stuck *in* the water at the end.”

And now a light flashed on them: it was the ruddy glow from a forge.

“Come in for a moment,” said their conductor, “till I see what is to be done. Tom Flint, lend us a lantern, and send your Jim to show some of these good people the way to the inn; they'll get no strong drink there,” he said, half to himself.

And now several of the unlucky company had straggled into the smithy, which was only a *few* yards from the swollen stream. Among these was Mark, partially sobered by the accident, and dripping from head to foot.

“Here's some capital stuff to stave off a cold,” he said, addressing Mrs Franklin and her daughter, whose faces were visible in the forge light: at the same time he rilled the cover of a small flask with spirits. “Come, let us be as jolly as we can under the circumstances.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs Franklin; “perhaps a very little mixed with water might be prudent, as Mary, I fear, is very wet.”

Mark stretched out the cup towards her, but before a drop could be taken the tall stranger had stepped forward, and snatching it, had emptied its contents on the glowing coals. Up there shot a brilliant dazzling flame to the smoky roof, and in that vivid blaze Mrs Franklin and Mary both recognised in their timely helper none other than Mr Esau Tankardew.

A Mysterious Stranger.

"This way, this way," said Mr Tankardew, utterly unmoved by the expression of angry astonishment on the face of Mark Rothwell at the sudden conversion of his cup of liquid fire into harmless flame—"Come this way, come this way, Mrs and Miss Franklin: Tom, give me the lantern, I'll take the ladies to Sam Hodges' farm, and do you be so good as to see this young gentleman across to the 'Wheatsheaf'; Jones will look well after them all, I know."

So saying, he offered his arm to Mrs Franklin, and bade Mary follow close behind.

"It will be all right, madam," he added, seeing a little hesitation on the part of his companion; "you may trust an old man to keep you out of harm's way: there, let me go first with the lantern; now, two steps and you are over the stile: the path is rather narrow, you must keep close to the hedge: just over three fields and we shall be there."

Not a word was uttered as they followed their guide. Mrs Franklin lifted up her heart in silent praise for their preservation, and in prayer for present direction. Backward and forward swayed the lantern, just revealing snatches of hedge and miry path. At last the deep barking of a dog told that they were not far off from a dwelling: the next minute Mr Tankardew exclaimed, "Here we are;" and the light showed them that they were come to a little gate in a paling fence.

"Hollo, Sam," shouted out their guide: the dog's barking was instantly changed into a joyful whine. A door opened a few yards in front of them, and a dark figure appeared in the midst of a square opening all ablaze with cheerful light.

"Hollo, Sam," said Mr Tankardew again, in a more subdued voice.

"Is that you, mayster? All right," cried the other.

"I've brought you some company, Sam, rather late though."

"You're welcome, mayster, company and all," was the reply. In a few moments all three had entered, and found themselves in an enormous kitchen, nearly large enough to accommodate a village. Huge beams crossed the low white ceiling; great massive doors opened in different directions rather on the slant through age, and giving a liberal allowance of space at top and bottom for ventilation. A small colony of hams and flitches hung in view; and a monstrous chimney, with a fire in the centre, invited a nearer approach, and seemed fashioned for a cozy retiring place from the world of kitchen. Everything looked warm and comfortable, from the farmer, his wife and daughter, to the two cats dozing on the hearth. Vessels of copper, brass, and tin shone so brightly that it seemed a shame to use them for anything but looking-glasses; while tables and chairs glowed with the results of perpetual friction.

"Come, sit ye down, sit ye down, ladies," said Mrs Hodges; "there, come into the chimney nook: eh! Deary me! Ye're quite wet."

"Yes, Betty," said Mr Tankardew, "these ladies joined a party to the hills, and, coming back, they've been nearly upset into the brook, which is running now like a mill stream; they came in an omnibus, and very nearly stuck fast in the middle; it is a mercy they were not all drowned; no thanks to the driver, though."

"Poor things," exclaimed the farmer's wife; "come, I must help you to some dry things, such as they are: and you must stay here to-night; it is not fit for you to go home, indeed it is not," she added, as Mrs Franklin prepared to decline.

"I'll make you as comfortable as ever I can. Jane, go and put a fire in the Red-room."

"Indeed," said Mrs Franklin, "I can't think of allowing you to put yourself to all this trouble; besides, our servants will be alarmed when they find us not returning."

"Leave that to me, madam," said Mr Tankardew; "I shall sleep at the 'Wheatsheaf' to-night, and will take care to send a trusty messenger over to 'The Shrubbery' to tell them how matters stand; and Mr Hodges will, I am sure, drive you over in his gig in the morning. Hark how the rain comes down! You really must stop: Mrs Hodges will make you very comfortable."

With many thanks, but still with considerable reluctance, Mrs Franklin acquiesced in this arrangement. Their hostess then accommodated them with such garments as they needed, and all assembled round the blazing fire. Mr Tankardew had divested himself of a rough top coat, and, looking like the gentleman he was, begged Mrs Hodges to give them some tea.

What a tea that was! Mary, though delicately brought up, thought she had never tasted anything like it, so delicious and reviving: such ham! Such eggs! Such bread! Such cream! Really, it was almost worth while getting the fright and the wetting to enjoy such a meal with so keen a relish.

"They've got a famous distillery in this house," remarked Mr Tankardew when they had finished their tea.

"A famous what?" asked Mrs Franklin, in great surprise.

"Dear me," said Mary aghast, "I really thought I—"

"Oh! You thought they were teetotalers here: well, you should know that it is a common custom in these parts to put rum or other spirits into the tea, especially when people have company. Now, Hodges and his wife are not content with putting spirits into the tea, but they put them into everything: into their bread, and their ham, and into their eggs."

Mrs Franklin looked partly dismayed and partly puzzled.

"Yes, it is true, madam. The fact is simply this: the spirits which my good tenants distil are made up of four ingredients—diligence, good temper, honesty, and total abstinence; and that is what makes everything they have to be so good of its kind."

"I wish we had more distilleries of this kind," said Mrs Franklin, smiling.

"So do I, madam; but it is a sadly dishonest, unfaithful, and self-indulgent age, and the drink has very much to do with it, directly or indirectly. Here, Sam," to the farmer and his wife who had just re-entered the kitchen, "do you and your mistress come and draw up your chairs, and give us a little of your thoughts on the subject; there's nothing, sometimes, so good as seeing with other people's eyes, specially when they are the eyes of persons who look on things from a different level of life."

"Why, Mayster Tankardew," said the farmer, "it isn't for the likes of me to be giving my opinion of things afore you and these ladies; but I *has* my opinion, nevertheless."

"Of course you have. Now, tell us what you think about the young people of our day, and their self-indulgent habits."

"Ah! Mayster! You're got upon a sore subject; it is time summut was done, we're losing all the girls and boys, there'll be none at all thirty years hence."

"Surely you don't mean," said Mrs Franklin anxiously, "that there is any unusual mortality just now among children."

"No, no, ma'am, that's not it," cried the farmer, laughing: "no, I mean that we shall have nothing but babies and men and women; we shall skip the boys and girls altogether."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, just this way, ma'am: as soon as young mayster and miss gets old enough to know how things is, they're too old for the nursery; they won't go in leading strings; they must be little men and women. Plain food won't do for 'em; they must have just what their pas and mas has. They've no notion of holding their tongues—not they; they must talk with the biggest; and I blames their parents for it, I do. They never think of checking them; they're too much like old Eli. The good old-fashioned rod's gone to light the fire with."

"Ay, and Sam," broke in his wife, "what's almost worst of all—and oh! It is a sin and a shame—they let 'em get to the beer and the wine and the spirits: you mustn't say them nay. Ay, it is sad, it is for sure, to see how these little ones is brought up to think of nothing but themselves; and then, when they goes wrong, their fathers and mothers can't think how it is."

"You're right, wife; they dress their bodies as they like, and eat and drink what they like, and don't see how Christ bought their bodies for Himself, and they are not their own. Ah! There'll be an awful reckoning one day. Young people can't grow up as they're doing and not leave a mark on our country as it'll take a big fire of the Almighty's chastisements to burn it out."

Mrs Franklin sighed, and Mary looked very thoughtful.

Mr Tankardew was about to speak when a faint halloo was heard above the noise of the storm, which was now again raging without. All paused to listen. It was repeated again, and this time nearer.

"Somebody missed his road, I should think," said Mr Tankardew.

"Maybe, sir; I'll go out and see."

So saying, Sam Hodges left the kitchen, and calling to quiet his dog who was barking furiously, soon returned with a stranger who was dressed in a long waterproof and felt hat, which he doffed on seeing the ladies, disclosing a head of curling black hair. He was rather tall, and apparently slightly made, as far as could be judged; for the wrappings in which he was clothed from head to foot concealed the build of his person.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said, in a gentlemanly voice. "It is a terrible night, and I've missed my way. I ought to have been at Hopeworth by now, perhaps you can kindly direct me."

"Nay," said the farmer, "you mustn't be off again to-night: we'll manage to take you in: we'll find you a bed, and you're welcome to such as we have to eat and drink: it is plain, but it is wholesome."

"A thousand thanks, kind friends," replied the other; "but I feel sure that I am intruding. These ladies—"

"We are driven in here like yourself by the storm," said Mrs Franklin. "I'm sure I should be the very last to wish any one to expose himself again to such a night on our account."

Mr Tankardew had not spoken since the stranger's entrance; he was sitting rather in shadow and the new-comer had scarcely noticed him. But now the old man leant forward, and looked at the new guest as though his whole soul was going out of his eyes; it was but for a moment, and then he leant back again. The stranger glanced from one to another, and then his eyes rested for a moment admiringly on Mary's face—and who could wonder! A sweeter picture and one more full of harmonious contrast could hardly be seen than the young girl with her hair somewhat negligently and yet neatly turned back from her forehead, her dress partly her own and partly the coarser garments of her hostess's daughter, sitting in that plain old massive kitchen, giving refinement and gaining simplicity, with the mingled glow of health and bashfulness lending a special brilliancy to her fair complexion. This was no ordinary man's

child the stranger saw, and again he expressed his willingness to retire and make his way to the town rather than intrude his company on those who might prefer greater privacy.

"Sit ye down, man, sit ye down," said Hodges; "the ladies 'll do very well, the kitchen's a good big un, so there's room for ye all. Have you crossed the brook? You'd find it no easy matter unless you came over the foot bridge."

"I'm sorry, my friend, to say," was the reply, "that I have both crossed the brook and been *in* it. I was about to go over by a little bridge a mile or so farther down, when I thought I saw some creature or other struggling in the water. I stooped down, and to my surprise and consternation found that it was a man. I plunged into the stream and contrived to drag him to the bank, but he was evidently quite dead. What I had taken for struggling was only the force of the stream swaying him about against the supports of the bridge. His dress was that of a coachman or driver of some public conveyance. I got help from a neighbouring cottage, and we carried him in, and I sent someone off for the nearest doctor, and then I thought to take a short cut into the road, and I've been wandering about for a long time now, and am very thankful to find any shelter."

During this account Mrs Franklin and her daughter turned deadly pale, and then the former exclaimed:

"I fear it was our poor driver—I heard a splash while our omnibus was struggling in the water. Oh! I fear, I fear it must have been the unfortunate man; and oh! Poor man, I'm afraid he wasn't in a fit state to die."

"If he was like your young friend at the forge, I fear not indeed," said Mr Tankardew.



"'THAT DRINK, THAT ACCURSED DRINK,' HE ADDED, RISING AND APPROACHING THE STRANGER, WHO WAS NOW DIVESTING HIMSELF OF HIS WET OUTER GARMENTS."—p. 54.

"That drink that accursed drink," he added, rising and approaching the stranger, who was now divesting himself of his wet outer garments. He was tall, as we have said, and his figure was slight and graceful; he wore a thick black beard and moustache, and had something of a military air; his eyes were piercing and restless, and seemed to take in at a glance and comprehend whatever they rested on.

But what was there in him that seemed familiar to Mrs Franklin and Mary? Had they seen him elsewhere? They felt sure that they had not, and yet his voice and face both reminded them of someone they had seen and heard before. The same thing seemed to strike Mr Tankardew, but, as he turned towards the young stranger, the latter started back and uttered a confused exclamation of astonishment. The old man also was now strangely moved, he muttered aloud:

"It must be—no—it cannot be: yes, it surely must be;" then he seemed to restrain himself by a sudden effort, he paused for a moment, and then with two rapid strides he reached the young man, placed his left hand upon the other's lips, and seizing him by the right hand hurried him out of the kitchen before another word could be spoken.

Poor Mrs Franklin and her daughter looked on in astonishment, hardly knowing what to say or think of this extraordinary proceeding, but their host reassured them at once.

"Never fear, ma'am, the old mayster couldn't hurt a fly; it'll be all right, take my word for it; there's summut strange as we can't make out. I think I sees a little into it, but it is not for me to speak if the mayster wants to keep things

secret. It'll all turn out right in the end, you may be sure. The old mayster's been getting a bit of a shake of late, but it is a shake of the right sort. He's been coming out of some of his odd ways and giving his mind to better things. He's had his heart broke once, but it seems to me as he's been getting it mended again."

For the next half hour, the farmer, his wife, and daughter were busy about their home concerns, and their two guests were left to their own meditations.

At last a distant door opened, and Mr Tankardew appeared followed by the young stranger. By the flickering fire Mrs Franklin thought she saw the traces of tears on both faces, and there was a strange light in the old man's eyes which she had not seen there before.

"Let me introduce you to a young friend and an old friend in one," he said, addressing the ladies; "this is Mr John Randolph, a great traveller."

Mrs Franklin said some kind words expressive of her pleasure in seeing the gratification Mr Tankardew felt in this renewal of acquaintance.

"Ah! Yes," said the old man; "you may well say gratification. Why, I've known this young gentleman's father ever since I can remember. Sam," he added to the farmer, who had just come in, "I'm going to run away with our young friend here, we shall both take up our quarters at the inn for to-night. I see it is fairer now. Mrs Franklin, pray make yourself quite easy. I shall despatch a messenger at once to 'The Shrubbery' with full particulars. Good-night! Good-night!"

And so Mary and her mother were left to their own musings and conjectures, for the farmer and his family made no allusion afterwards to the events of the evening.

Chapter Five.

The Young Musician.

A Grand piano being carried into Mr Esau Tankardew's! What next! What *can* the old gentleman want with a grand piano? Most likely he has taken it for a bad debt—some tenant sold up. But say what they may, the fact is the same. And, stranger still, a tuner pays a visit to put the instrument in tune. What can it all mean? Marvellous reports, too, tell of a sudden domestic revolution. The dust and cobwebs have had notice to quit, brooms and brushes have travelled into corners and crevices hitherto unexplored, the piano rests in a parlour which smiles in the gaiety of a new carpet and new curtains; prints have come to light upon the walls, chairs and tables have taken heart, and now wear an honest gloss upon their legs and faces; ornaments, which had hitherto been too dirty to be ornamental, now show themselves in their real colours. Outside the house, also, wonderful things have come to pass; the rocking doorstep is at rest, and its fellow has been adjusted to a proper level; *ever*-greens have taken the place of the old *never*-greens; knocker and door handle are not ashamed to show their native brass; the missing rails have returned to their duty in the ranks. The whole establishment, including its master, has emerged out of a state of foggy dilapidation. Old Molly Gilders has retired into the interior, and given place above stairs to a dapper damsel. As for the ghosts, they could not be expected to remain under such *dispiriting* circumstances, and have had the good sense to resort to some more congenial dwelling.

While gossip on this unlooked-for transformation was still flying in hot haste about Hopeworth and the neighbourhood, the families both at "The Firs" and "The Shrubbery" were greatly astonished one morning by an invitation to spend an evening at Mr Tankardew's.

"Well," said Mr Rothwell, "I suppose it won't do to decline; the old gentleman means it, no doubt, as an attention, and it would not be politic to vex him."

"I am sure, my dear," said his wife, "I can't think of going. I shall be bored to death; you must make my excuses and accept the invitation for the girls. I don't suppose Mark will care to go; the old man seems to have a spite against him—I can't tell why."

"I'll go," interposed Mark, "if it be only to see the fun. I'll be on my good behaviour. I'll call for tea and toast-and-water at regular intervals all through the evening, and then the old gentleman will be sure to put me down for something handsome in his will."

"You'd better take some music with you," said his mother, turning to her eldest daughter; "Mr Tankardew has got his new piano on purpose, I suppose."

"Ay, do," cried Mark; "take something lively, and you'll fetch out the old spiders and daddy-long-legs which have been sent into the corners like naughty boys, and they'll come out by millions and dance for us."

So it was settled that the invitation should be accepted. The surprise at "The Shrubbery" was of a more agreeable kind. Mrs Franklin and her daughter had learnt to love the old man, in spite of his eccentricities; they saw the sterling strength and consistency of his character. They had, however, hardly expected such an invitation; but the reports of the strange changes in progress in Mr Tankardew's dwelling had reached their ears, so that it was evident that he was intending, for some unknown reasons, to break through the reserve and retirement of years, and let a little more light and sociability into the inner recesses of his establishment. That he had a special object in doing this they felt assured; what that object was they could not divine. Had Mrs Franklin known that the Rothwells had been asked, she would have declined the invitation; but she was unaware of this till she had agreed to go; it was then too late to draw back.

All the guests were very punctual on the appointed evening, curiosity having acted as a stimulant with the Rothwells of a more wholesome kind than they were in the habit of imbibing. What a change! It was now the end of October, and the evenings were chilly, so that all were glad of the cheery fire, partly of wood and partly of coal, which threw its brightness all abroad in flashes of restless light. Old pictures, apparently family portraits, adorned the walls, relieved by prints of a more modern and lively appearance. One space was bare, where a portrait might have been expected as a match to another on the other side of the fireplace. The omission struck every one at once on entering. The furniture, generally, was old-fashioned, and somewhat subdued in its tints, as though it had long languished under the cold shade of neglect, and had passed its best days in obscurity.

Not many minutes, however, were given to the guests for observation, for Mr Tankardew soon appeared in evening costume, accompanied by the young stranger who had taken refuge on the night of the storm in Samuel Hodges' farm kitchen. Mr Tankardew introduced him to the Rothwells as Mr John Randolph, an old-young friend. "I've known his father sixty years and more," he said; then he added, "my young friend has travelled a good deal, and will have some curiosities to show you by-and-by—but now let us have tea. Mrs Franklin, pray do me the honour to preside."

While tea was in progress, Mr Tankardew suddenly surprised his guests by remarking dryly, and abruptly:

"You must know, ladies and gentlemen, that my mother was a brewer."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr Rothwell, in considerable astonishment; and then asked, "was the business an extensive one?"

"Pretty well, pretty well," was the reply. "She brewed every morning and night, but she'd only one *dray* and that was a *tray*, and she'd a famous large teapot for a vat; we never used hops nor sent our barley to be malted, what little we used we gave to the fowls; and we never felt the want of porter, or pale ale, or bitter beer."

"It is a pity that more people are not of your mother's mind," said Mrs Franklin, laughing.

"So it is indeed; but I shouldn't, perhaps, have said anything about it, only the teapot you've got in your hand now was my dear old mother's brewery, and that set me thinking and talking about it."

It was not their host's fault, nor Mr John Randolph's, who acted as joint entertainer, if their guests did not make a hearty tea. The meal concluded, Mr Tankardew requested his young friend to bring out some of his curiosities. These greatly interested all the party—especially Mrs Franklin and Mary, who were delighted with the traveller's liveliness and intelligence.

"Show our friends some of your sketches," said the old man. These were produced, and were principally in water colours, evidently being the work of a master's hand. As he turned to a rather un-English scene, the young artist sighed and said, "I have some very sad remembrances connected with that sketch."

"Pray let us have them," said Mr Tankardew. Mr Randolph complied, and proceeded: "This is an Australian sketch: you see those curious-looking trees, they are blue and red gums: there is the wattle, too, with its almond-scented flowers, and the native lilac. That cottage in the foreground was put up by an enterprising colonist, who went out from England some fifteen years ago; you see how lovely its situation is with its background of hills. I was out late one evening with a young companion, and we were rather jaded with walking, when we came upon this cottage. We stood upon no ceremony, but marched in and craved hospitality, which no one in the bush ever dreamt of refusing. We found the whole family at supper: the father had died about a year before of consumption, after he had fenced in his three acres and built his house, and planted vineyard and peach orchard. There were sheep, too, with a black fellow for a shepherd, and a stock yard with some fine bullocks in it; altogether, it was a tidy little property, and a blooming family to manage it. The widow sat at the head of the table, and her son, a young man of two-and-twenty, next to her. There were three younger children, two girls and a boy, all looking bright and healthy. We had a hearty welcome, and poured out news while they poured out tea, which with damper (an Australian cake baked on the hearth), and mutton made an excellent meal. When tea was over we had a good long talk, and found that the young farmer was an excellent son, and in a fair way to establish the whole family in prosperity. Well, the time came for



"MY COMPANION TOOK OUT A FLASK OF SPIRITS, AND SAID, 'COME, LET US DRINK TO OUR NEXT HAPPY MEETING, AND SUCCESS TO THE FARM.'—p. 66.

parting, they pressed us to stay the night, but we could not. Just as we were leaving, my companion took out a flask of spirits, and said, 'Come, let us drink to our next happy meeting, and success to the farm.' I shall never forget the look of the poor mother, nor of the young man himself; the old woman turned very pale, and the son very red, and said, 'Thank you all the same, I've done with these things, I've had too much of them.' 'Oh! Nonsense,' my friend said; 'a little drop won't hurt you, perhaps we may never meet again.' 'Well, I don't know,' said the other, in a sort of irresolute way. I could see he was thirsting for the drink, for his eye sparkled when the flask was produced. I whispered to my friend to forbear, but he would not. 'Nonsense,' he said; 'just a little can do them no harm, it is only friendly to offer it.' 'Just a taste, then, merely a taste,' said our host, and produced glasses. The mother tried to interfere, but her son frowned her into silence. So grog was made, and the younger ones, too, must taste it, and before we left the flask had been emptied. I took none myself, for never has a drop of intoxicants passed my lips since I first left my English home. I spoke strongly to my companion when we were on our way again, but he only laughed at me, and said, 'What's the harm?'"

"And what *was* the harm?" asked Mark, in a rather sarcastic tone.

"I will tell you," replied John Randolph, quietly. "Four years later I passed along across the same track, and thought I would look in on my old entertainer. I found the place, but where were the owners? All was still as death, little of the fence remained, the stock yard was all to pieces, the garden was a wilderness, the cottage a wreck. I made inquiries afterward very diligently, and heard that the young farmer had taken to drinking, that the younger children had followed his example, the poor mother was in her grave, and her eldest son a disreputable vagabond; where the rest were no one knew. Oh! I resolved when I heard it that never would I under any circumstances offer intoxicating drinks to others, as I had previously, while myself a total abstainer, occasionally done."

"But surely," said Mr Rothwell, "we are not answerable for the abuse which others may make of what is lawful and useful if taken in moderation. The other day I offered the guard of my train a glass of ale; he took it; afterward the train ran off the line through his neglect; it seems he was drunken, but he appeared all right when I gave him the ale; surely I was not answerable there? The guard ought to have stopped and refused when he knew he had had enough."

"No, not answerable for the accident, perhaps," said Mr Tankardew; "but your case and the case just related by my young friend are not quite parallel, for his companion knew that the farmer had, by his own confession, been in the habit of exceeding; *you* didn't know but that the guard was a moderate man."

"Exactly so," replied the other; "I presumed, of course, that he knew when to stop."

"And yet, my dear sir," rejoined the old man, earnestly, "isn't it perilous work offering a stimulant which is so ruinous to tens of thousands, and has emptied multitudes of homes of health, and peace, and character?"

"Well, it may be so; I'm certainly beginning to think it anything but wise getting children into the habit of liking these things;" and he glanced anxiously at Mark, who appeared intensely absorbed in looking at some photographs upside down.

There was a few moments' pause, and then the old man said, "Come, let us have a little music, perhaps Miss Rothwell will favour us."

Nothing loth, the young lady led off in a brilliant sonata, displaying in the execution more strength of muscle than purity of taste; then came a duet by the eldest and youngest sisters, and then a song by the second. Mr Tankardew expressed his satisfaction emphatically at the conclusion, possibly more at finding the performance ended than at the performance itself.

Mr John Randolph then seated himself at the piano, at the host's request, and addressed himself to his work with a loving earnestness that showed that the soul of music dwelt within him. The very first chords he struck riveted at once the attention of every one, an attention which was deepened into surprised delight, as he executed with perfect finish passages of surpassing brilliancy growing out of the national airs of many countries—airs which floated out from the entanglements of the more rapid portions with an earnest pathos that held every hearer as with a spell of enchantment.

"Marvellous, marvellous! Bravo!" cried both Mr Rothwell and Mark at the conclusion.

"My young friend," said Mr Tankardew, "will be glad to give lessons in music, as an occupation. He will be making my house his home at present."

There was a slight expression of surprise on every face, and of something like scorn or contempt on the Rothwells'. However, both the young ladies at "The Firs" and Mrs Franklin expressed their wish to engage Mr Randolph's services, and so it was arranged.

Chapter Six.

Heartless Work.

Music certainly flourished at "The Firs" and "The Shrubbery" under the able instructions of Mr John Randolph. The young man's manner was puzzling to his pupils at both houses. With the Misses Rothwell (who gave *themselves* airs, besides practising those which were given them by their master), he was quietly civil and deferential, and yet made them sensible of his superiority to them in a way which they could not help feeling, and yet equally could not resent. With Mary Franklin his respectful manner was mingled with an almost tenderness, ever kept in check by a cautious self-restraint. What did it mean? It made her feel embarrassed and almost unhappy. She had no wish to entangle the young musician's affections, and indeed felt that her own were getting entangled with Mark Rothwell. Mark contrived to throw himself a good deal in her way at this time, far more than her mother liked, but Mr Rothwell himself seemed bent on promoting the intimacy, and his son laid himself out to please. There was, moreover, rankling in Mary's heart the impression that Mark was being harshly judged by her mother; this helped to draw her closer to him. He was, besides, an excellent performer on the flute, and would sometimes come over on lesson mornings and accompany her, much to the annoyance of her instructor.

On one of these occasions, a little more than a year after the party at his house, Mr Tankardew was present, having made an unusually early call. Mark wished him gone, and when the music lesson was over, and Mr Randolph had retired, hoped that the old man would take his leave; but nothing seemed farther from that gentleman's thoughts, so that Mark was obliged to bottle up his wrath (the only spirit, alas! That he ever did bottle up), and to leave Mr Tankardew in possession. When he was gone, the old man looked keenly at mother and daughter. Mrs Franklin coloured and sighed. Mary turned very red and then very pale, and took an earnest passing interest in the pattern of the hearthrug.

"A very musical young gentleman, Mr Mark Rothwell," said their visitor dryly. "I wish he'd breathe as much harmony into his home as he breathes melody out of his flute." Neither mother nor daughter spoke, but Mary's heart beat very fast. "Hem! I see," continued the other, "you don't believe it! Only slander, malice, lies. Well, take my word for it, the love that comes out of the brandy flask will never get into the teapot. I wish you both a very good morning; ay, better one than this, a great deal;" and with a sternness of manner quite unusual, the old man took his leave.

"How cruel! How unjust!" exclaimed Mary, when Mr Tankardew was gone. "Poor Mark! Every one strikes at him."

But *was* it cruel? *was* it unjust? Let us go with Mark Rothwell himself, as he leaves his house that very night, sneaking out at the backdoor like a felon.

A few hundred yards to the rear of the outbuildings stood a neat and roomy cottage; this was occupied by John Gubbins, the coachman, a man bound to Mark by unlimited donations of beer, and equally bound to a gang of swindlers who had floated their way to his pocket and privacy on the waves of strong drink. John had been gambling with these men, and had of course lost his money to them, and somebody else's too: the hard-earned savings of one of the maids who had trusted him to put them in the bank: of course he meant to repay them, with interest; that is to say, when the luck turned in his favour; but luck, like fortune, is blind, and tramples on those who court her most. It was very dark outside, as Mark groped his way along; but a muffled light showed him where the cottage window was. Three times he gave a long, low whistle, and then knocked four distinct raps on the door, which was cautiously opened by a man with a profusion of hair, beard and whiskers, which looked as though they did not belong to him, as was probably the case, not only with his hair, but with everything else that he wore, including some tarnished ornaments.

"All right, sir, come in," he said, and Mark entered.

What a scene for a young man brought up as he had been! Could he really find any satisfaction in it? Yes, birds that

love carrion flock together, and there was plenty of moral carrion here. A long deal table occupied the middle of the room, a smaller round one stood under the window and supported a tray loaded with glasses and pipes, with a tall black bottle in the midst of them. The glasses were turned upside down for the present, a pity it should not have been for the future too; they looked with the bottle in the centre like a little congregation surrounding a preacher. Oh! What a sermon of woe that bottle might have preached to them! But it didn't speak; it was to set on fire the tongues of other speakers. There was a coloured print over the mantelpiece of Moses smiting the rock. What a solemn contrast to the streams of fire-water soon about to flow! John Gubbins sat at the top of the table, looking fat and anxious, half shy and half foolish; the man with the false hair and ornaments placed himself next to him. Three other strangers were present, a mixture of sham gentility and swagger, of whom it would be difficult to say which had descended into the lowest depths of blackguardism. And now business was begun; the glasses were transferred to the larger table, the bottle uncorked, lemons and sugar produced, and the poor kettle, made for better things, forced to defile its healthful contents by mixture with liquid madness, in the shape of whisky; then out came cards and dice. But what sound was that? Three very faint trembling whistles, followed by four equally feeble taps at the door? Another madman, who was he? Could it really be Jim Forbes, the footman, that respectable, steady-looking young man, who waited daily at the dining tables? Alas! It was indeed. Jim was the son of a poor widow, whose husband, a small farmer, had died of fever, leaving behind him a large family, a small cottage, smaller savings, and a good character; Jim was the eldest sort, and next to him was a poor crippled sister, whose patient hands added a little to the common stock by sewing; Jim, however, had been his widowed mother's mainstay since his father's death, and a willing, loving helper he was: ay, he *had* been, but was he still? Jim had got a place at "The Firs"; first of all as a general helper, then as a footman, in which latter capacity he enjoyed the very questionable privilege of waiting at table, and hearing what was said at meals by Mr and Mrs Rothwell, their children, and guests. What Jim learnt on these occasions was this, that money and strong drink were the chief things worth living for. He didn't believe it at first, for he saw in his mother's cottage real happiness where there was little money and less alcohol; he saw, too, on his suffering sister's brow a gilding of heaven's sunshine more lovely than burnished gold, and a smile on her thin pale lips, which grace and love made sweeter than the most sparkling laugh of unsanctified beauty. Still, what he heard so constantly on the lips of those better educated than himself left its mark; he began to long for things out of his reach, and to pilfer a little and then a little more of what *was* in his reach, not money, but drink. Indeed he heard so much about betting and gambling, his master's guests seemed to find the cards and the dice box so convenient a way of slipping a few pounds out of a friend's pocket into their own without the trouble of giving an equivalent, that poor Jim got confused. True, he had learnt in the eighth commandment, when a boy, the words, "Thou shalt not steal"; but these better-informed guests at Mr Rothwell's seemed able to take a flying leap over this scriptural barrier without any trouble, so he swallowed his scruples and his master's wine at the same time, and thought he should like to have an opportunity of turning a snug little legacy of a hundred pounds, left him by an uncle, into something handsomer by a lucky venture or two. Conscience was not satisfied at first, but he silenced it by telling himself that he was going to enrich his poor mother, and make a lady of his crippled sister. Somehow or other there is a strange attraction that draws together kindred spirits in evil. Mark Rothwell found out what was going on in Jim's mind, and determined to make use of him; only, of course, so as to get himself out of a little difficulty. Oh! No! He meant the poor lad no harm; nay, he intended to put him in the way of making his fortune. So one day after dinner Mark and the young man were closeted together for an hour in the butler's pantry; wine flowed freely, and Jim was given to understand that his young master was quite willing to admit his humble companion into a choice little society of friends who were to meet at the coachman's cottage on certain evenings, and play games of chance, in which, after due instruction from Mark, a person of Jim's intelligence would be sure to win a golden harvest without the tedious process of tilling and sowing. The instructions commenced there and then in the pantry; several games were played, nearly all of which Jim won to his great delight. They only played "for love" this time, Mark said, but it was difficult to see where the "love" was, except for the drink, and there was plenty of that. One little favour, however, was required by the young master, for initiating Jim into the mysteries and miseries of gambling, and that was that he should lend his instructor what money he could spare, as Mark happened to be rather short just at this time. So Jim drew out a part of his legacy from the bank, and deposited half in Mark's hands; the other half he took with him to the coachman's cottage. Oh! It was a grand thing to be allowed to sit with such company, and to hear the wonderful stories of the gentlemen who condescended to come and place their stores of gold and silver within a poor footman's reach. What with the tales, and the songs, and the whisky punch, Jim thought himself the happiest fellow alive the first night he joined the party, especially when he found himself the winner of three or four bright sovereigns, which had become his own for the mere throwing down of a few cards, and a rattle or two of the dice box. But all was not so pleasant the next morning. Jim awoke with a sick headache and a sore heart. And what should he do with his winnings? He would take them to his mother: nay, the very thought stung him like a serpent. His mother would want to know how he got the gold; or, when he threw it into her lap, she would say, "The Lord bless you, Jimmy, and give it you back a hundredfold"; and his sister would clasp her wasted hands in thankfulness, and he could not bear to think of a mother's blessing and a sister's prayers over gains that were tainted with the leprosy of sin. So he kept the money, and the next night of meeting he lost it, and more besides; and then another night he was a gainer; and the gambler's thirst grew strong in him. But loss soon followed loss. His legacy was slipping surely down into the pockets of his new friends. Cruel! Cruel! Heartless Mark! And oh! The cursed drink! What meanness is there to which it will not lead its slaves?

And now the night came we have before referred to. John Gubbins sat at the top of the table; Jim Forbes took his place near him. The spirits went round; the cards and dice were busy. John Gubbins lost, and Mark won. Jim Forbes lost; and his cheeks flushed, and his eyes glittered with excitement, and he ground his teeth together. The strangers affected to be surprised at his ill luck; really they couldn't understand it, they said; they were quite sorry for him; but, "nothing venture, nothing win"; *his* turn would come next. But it did not come that night. Jim had now drawn the whole of his legacy from the bank. The last sovereign was staked; it was lost. He sprang to his feet, seized the uncut pack of cards, and hurled it to the further end of the room; then he shook his fist at his new companions, calling them cheats and villains. Up darted the man with the exuberant hair, and up rose Mark and Gubbins. But what was *that*? A strange noise outside. The dog in the kennel muttered a low growl, and then began to bark furiously; then the approach of footsteps was plain; a deathlike stillness fell on the whole party; the strangers caught up the cards and dice, and looked this way and that, pale and aghast. And now there came a loud and peremptory knocking at the door, as of men who were determined to find entrance.

"Who's there?" asked Gubbins, in quivering tones.

"Open the door," was the reply from a deep, loud voice.

"I can't, by no means, do nothing of the sort, at this unseasonable hour," said the coachman, a little more boldly.

"Open the door, or I'll force it," said the same voice.

Poor Mark! And poor, wretched Jim! How utterly guilty and crestfallen they looked! As for the gamblers, they cowered together, in abject terror, not daring to attempt a retreat by the back, lest the enemy should be lurking for them there.

"Will you open the door, or will you not?"

No answer from within.



"THEN CAME A TREMENDOUS BLOW; THEN A FOOT WAS SEEN FORCING ITS WAY OVER THE DOORSILL."—p' 83.

Then came a tremendous blow; then a foot was seen forcing its way over the doorsill, another moment, and the barrier to the entrance of the invaders gave way with a rattling crash.

Chapter Seven.

Bitter Fruit.

No sooner was the door burst open, than in rushed several stout men, who proceeded to seize and handcuff the four strangers, who made but the faintest show of resistance. John Gubbins shook with abject terror, as he tried in vain to double up his fat person into a small compass in a corner. Jim Forbes stood speechless for a moment, and then darted out through the open doorway. As for Mark Rothwell, what with shame and dismay, and semi-intoxication from whisky punch, his position and appearance were anything but enviable. He recovered himself, however, in a few minutes, and turned fiercely on the intruders.

"By what right, and by whose authority," he cried, "do you dare to break into my coachman's house, and to lay violent hands on these gentlemen?"

"By this warrant, young sir," said the chief of the invading party, producing a parchment. "I'm a detective; I've been looking after these *gentlemen* a long time; they are part of a regular gang of pickpockets and swindlers, and we've a case or two against 'em as 'll keep 'em at home, under lock and key, for a bit. I'm sorry we've been so rough, but I was afraid of losing 'em. I didn't think to find 'em in such company, and I hope, young gent, if you'll let me give you a word of advice, that you'll keep clear of such as these for the future for your own sake."

Alas! Poor Mark! Crestfallen and wretched, he slunk away home.

And what had become of Jim Forbes? Nobody knew at "The Firs." He was missing that night and the next day. Mr Rothwell asked for him at breakfast, and was told that he had not slept in the house the night before, and was nowhere to be found. The day passed away, but Jim did not make his appearance.

It was a dark November evening: a dim light twinkled through the casement of Mrs Forbes' cottage: the wind was whistling and sighing mournfully, sometimes lulling for a while, and then rising and rushing through crack and crevice with a wild complaining moan. Inside that little dwelling were weeping eyes and aching hearts. Upstairs all was peace; four little children lay fast asleep in the inner chamber, twined in each other's ruddy arms, their regular breathing contrasting, in its deep peace, with the fitful sighings of the wind; yet on the long eyelashes of one of the little sleepers there stood a glistening tear, and from the parted lips there came, now and again, the words, "Brother Jim."

But ah! No blessed sleep stilled the throbbing hearts of those who cowered over the scanty fire in the kitchen below; Jim's mother and crippled sister. Was it poverty that made them sad? No. Poverty was there, but it was very neat and cleanly poverty. No, it was not poverty that wrung the bitter tears from the eyes of those heart-sick watchers; they were rich in faith; they could trust God; they could afford to wait. It wasn't *that*. Jim! Poor Jim! Poor erring Jim! How changed he had been of late; none of his old brightness; none of his old love. It wasn't so much that he brought his mother no welcome help now; it was hard to miss it, but she could battle on without. It wasn't that crippled Sally's cheek grew paler because she was forced to do without the little comforts supplied so long by a brother's thoughtful love, though it was harder still to miss these. No, but it was that mother and daughter both saw, too plainly, that Jim was going down-hill, and that too with quickening steps. They saw that he was getting the slave of the drink, and they feared that there was worse behind; and, of course, there was: for when did ever the drink-fiend get an immortal being into his grasp without bringing a companion demon along with him? And now, this very day, Jim was reported to them as being missing from "The Firs," and dark suspicions and terrible rumours were afloat, and John Gubbins' name and the young master's name were mixed up with them. Mother and daughter sat there together by the dying embers, and shuddered closer to one another at each moaning of the blast.

"Oh, mother! I'm heartbroke," at last burst out from the poor girl's lips: "to think of our Jim, so kind, so good, 'ticed away by that miserable drink, and gone nobody knows where."

"Hush! Hush! Child, ye mustn't fret; I've faith to believe as the Lord 'll not forsake us: He'll bring our Jim back again: He'll hear a mother's prayer: He'll—"

But here a sudden sound of uneven footsteps made the poor widow start to



"THEN JIM STAGGERED INTO THE ROOM, HAGGARD, BLEAR-EYED, MUTTERING TO HIMSELF SAVAGELY."—p. 89.

her feet, and Sally to cry out. The next moment the door was rudely shaken, and then Jim staggered into the room, haggard, blear-eyed, muttering to himself savagely. The sight of his mother and sister seemed partially to sober him, for the spirit within him bowed instinctively before the beauty of holiness, which neither poverty nor terror could obliterate from the face of those whom he used to love so dearly. But the spell was soon broken.

"I say," he exclaimed, "what's to do here? I want my supper; I haven't scarce tasted to-day, and nobody cares for me no more nor a dog. I say, mother, stir yourself, and get me my supper." He flung himself into a chair, with an oath, as he almost lost his balance.

Oh! Misery! Misery! Every word was a separate stab, but Mrs Forbes restrained herself.

"Jim, dear," she said, soothingly, "we've nothing in the house for supper: we didn't expect you: we hoped you'd gone back to your master's."

"Ah! There it is! Didn't expect me! No supper! This is all I'm to get after spending all my wages on them as don't care to give me a mouthful of meat and a drop of drink when I want 'em!"

"Jim! Jim! Don't," exclaimed his poor sister, "oh! Don't! For the Lord's sake! You'll repent it bitterly by-and-by! Oh! It can't be our dear, kind Jim, as God sent to help and comfort us! We'd give you meat and drink, if we had them, but the last crumb's gone, and mother's never bitten to-day!"

"Nonsense! Don't tell *me!* None of your humbug and cant with me! If I can't get supper where I ought, I'll get it where I can! I'll not darken this door again as sure as my name's Jim Forbes!"

With a scowl, and a curse, and a slam of the door that startled the little ones from their sleep, the miserable son flung himself out of his home. The next day he enlisted; the day following he was gone altogether.

Weep! Weep! Ye holy angels! Howl with savage glee, ye mocking fiends! See what the drink can do! And yet, O wondrous strange! There are thinking men, loving men, Christian men, who tell us we are wrong, we are mad in trying to pluck the intoxicating cup away from men and women, and to keep it wholly out of the hands of little children and upgrowing boys and girls. Mad are we? Be it so; but there's method, there's holy love, there's heavenly wisdom in our madness.

A month had passed away, but no tidings of Jim Forbes; no letter telling of penitence or love. Oh! If he would only write: only just a word: only to say, "Mother, sister, I love you still." But no; hearts must wither, hearts must break, as the idol car of intemperance holds on its way, crushing out life temporal and eternal from thousands and tens of thousands who throw themselves madly under its wheels. But must it be so for ever?—No! It cannot, it shall not be, God helping us; for their rises up a cry to heaven against the unholy traffic in strong drink; a cry that *must* be heard.

The snow was falling fast, but not faster nor more softly than the tears of the widowed mother and the crippled daughter, as they bowed themselves down before the cold bars, which ought to have enclosed a mass of glowing coals on that pitiless December day; but only a dull red spark or two, amid a heap of dust, just twinkled in the grate, and seemed to mock their wretchedness. Cold! Cold! Everything was cold there but faith and love. Food there was none! But on the little table lay the open Bible; and just beneath those weary, swollen eyes, were the words, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." But what were those voices? Were they the voices of angels? Poor, shivering, weary watchers! They might almost seem so to you. Anyhow, they were very gentle, loving voices; and now they ask admittance. Mrs Franklin and Mary entered; and, though not angels, they were come to do angels' work, as messengers of love and mercy. Tea, and bread and butter, and eggs, and divers other comforts came suddenly to light from under the wide folds of the ladies' cloaks, and then the visitors sat down, and stopped the outburst of tearful thanks by bright loving words of pity and interest.

"Oh, ma'am! It is true, but I never knowed afore how true it was that God will never forsake His own. I'd well nigh given up all for lost."

"Nay, mother," said Sally; "it wasn't you, it was me; *your* faith held out still."

"I was very, very sorry to hear of your troubles," said Mrs Franklin after a pause; "but you mustn't despair; God will bring your poor son back again."

"Oh! I believe it, ma'am, but it is hard not to doubt when one's cold and hunger-bitten; he was such a good lad to us afore he took to that miserable drink."

"Well, we must pray for him, and I daresay Mr and Mrs Rothwell will stand your friends."

"Friends! Ma'am," cried the poor woman; "oh! You don't know, ma'am; look, ma'am, at yon empty cupboard; there ought to be meat and drink there, ma'am, and earned by honest labour. It is not an hour, ma'am, since I was up at 'The Firs,' taking back some work as my poor Sally did for the young ladies (she's a beautiful sewer, is our Sally, there's none to match her in all Hopeworth), and I'd a fortnight's charing as I was owed for. I'd left the little ones with a kind neighbour, so I went up to the house and asked to see the missus: she couldn't see me, but I begged hard; and they showed me up into the drawing-room. Mrs Rothwell was lying on a 'sofy,' and there was wine on a table close by, and the young ladies was all crowding round the fire, contradicting their mother, and quarrelling with one another. 'Oh! For goodness' sake don't interrupt us,' says one of the young ladies, and their mamma bids me sit down; and there I sat for a long time, till Miss Jane had finished a fairy tale; something about a young lady as was shut up in a castle to be eaten by a giant; and how a young gentleman fell in love with her, and got a fairy to turn her into a bird, and get her out of the castle: and they all cried over the story as if their hearts would break, and when it was over they all had some wine; and Mrs Rothwell, who had been crying very much too, asked me what I wanted. So I told her as I'd come to my last penny, and I should be very thankful if she'd be so good as to pay me for my work, and for what our Sally had been doing for the young ladies. Then she fired up at once, and told me she thought it very impertinent in me coming and teasing her in that way, as she meant to pay me as soon as it was convenient; and oh! Ma'am! Then she asked me what I wanted for Sally's work; and when I told her, she said I charged too much,

though I didn't ask above half as they'd ask for it in Hopeworth; and then she nearly cut my heart in two by saying (Oh, ma'am! I can't scarce bear to repeat it), that I shouldn't have come to pester her if it hadn't been for my idle vagabond of a son (them was the very words she used, ma'am), as had run away and left his place. Oh, Mrs Franklin! You're a mother; you know how I must feel for my poor wanderer, for he's my own flesh and blood still. I durstn't speak; I couldn't stay; and I've come back penniless as I went: but the Lord has sent you to help me, and I'll never doubt Him again."

"Never do," said her visitor; "I'll find you and Sally work for the present, and try and think charitably of Mrs Rothwell; she may mean more kindly than she has spoken."

"Mean kindly! Oh! Dear Mrs Franklin! The drink has washed out all kindness: there's ruin hanging over that house, not as I wishes it to them, but it is so. The children's been brought up to think of just nothing but themselves; their eating and drinking, and dressing, and playing: there's sipping in the parlour all day long; drinking in the dining-room; swilling in the kitchen. Our poor Jim's seen his betters there living as if men, women, and children had nothing to do in this world but to drown the thoughts of the next in drink and pleasure, and he's learnt his lesson too well; but I trust the Lord 'll take the book out of his hand, and teach him the better way again."

"I'm afraid what you say is too true," remarked Mrs Franklin, sadly; "if our young people continue to be brought up in such self-indulgent habits, we may well expect to hear God crying aloud by His judgments, 'Woe to the drunkards of England,' as He once cried, 'Woe to the drunkards of Ephraim.'"

Chapter Eight.

A Double Peril.

"I'll tell you what it is, Mark, I *must* have a stop put to this: my patience is quite worn out. Do you think I'm made of money? Do you think I can coin money as fast as you choose to spend it? You'll ruin me with your thoughtless, selfish extravagance, and break your mother's heart and mine by your drunkenness and folly, that you will."

These words, uttered in a tone of passionate bitterness, were spoken by Mr Rothwell to his son in the hall at "The Firs," as the young man was urging his father to grant him a considerable sum to pay some pressing debts. At the same moment Mr John Randolph came out of the drawing-room, and could not help overhearing what was being said.

Mr Rothwell turned fiercely upon him:

"What right have *you*, sir, to be intruding on my privacy?" he cried, nettled at his rebuke having been overheard by a stranger.

"I am not conscious of being guilty of any intrusion," said the other quietly.

"You *are* intruding," cried Mark, glad to vent his exasperation at his father's reproaches on somebody, and specially glad of an opportunity of doing so on the music-master.

"You shall not need to make the complaint again then," said Mr Randolph, calmly, "my lessons to your sisters will cease from to-day;" and with a stiff bow he closed the door behind him.

Rather more than two years had elapsed since Jim Forbes' enlistment when the scene just described took place. Mark had been sinking deeper and deeper in the mire; he was scarcely ever sober except when visiting the Franklins, on which occasions he was always on his guard, though his excited manner, and the eagerness with which he tossed down the few glasses of wine to which he, evidently with difficulty, restricted himself, made a most painful impression not only on Mrs Franklin, but also on her daughter.

Mary was now nineteen, and shone with the brightness which the gentle light of holiness casts on every word and feature. She was full of innocent cheerfulness, and was the joy of all who knew her. Mark loved her as much as he could love anything that was not himself, and tried to make himself acceptable to her. Mary *hoped* the best about him, but that hope had begun to droop for some time past. He had never yet ventured to declare his affection to her; somehow or other he could not. A little spark of nobleness still remained in him unquenched by the drink, and it lighted him to see that to bind Mary to himself for life would be to tie her to a living firebrand that would scorch and shrivel up beauty, health and peace. He dared not speak: before her unsullied loveliness his drink-enslaved lips were closed: he could rattle on in wild exuberance of spirits, but he could not yet venture to ask her to be his. And she? She pitied him deeply, and her heart's affections hovered over him; would they settle there? If so, lost! Lost! All peace would be lost: how great her peril!

Another visit from Mr Tankardew: the old man had been a frequent caller, and was ever welcome. That he cherished a fatherly love for Mary was evident; indeed his heart seemed divided between herself and the young musician, Mr John Randolph, who, though he had ceased to give lessons at "The Firs," was most scrupulously punctual in his attendance at "The Shrubbery."

It was a bright summer's morning as the old man sat in the drawing-room where Mary and her mother were engaged in the mysteries of the needle.

"Let me hear your last piece, my child," he said; "John tells me that he will soon have nothing more to teach you."

Mary sat down and played with loving grace, till the old man bowed his head upon his hands and wept.

"Home, sweet home!" he murmured. "Ay; you have played that lovely air with variations as if you felt it: you know

what a sweet home is, Mary; I knew it once. 'Home, sweet home!'" he added again, with a sigh.

There was a pause: then he went on: "There are plenty of homes that aren't sweet; homes with variations enough and to spare in them; but they're variations of misery. I hope you'll never have one of those homes, my child."

Mary coloured deeply, and her mother's eyes filled with tears. Mr Tankardew looked earnestly at them both.

"No danger of any but sweet variations *here*," he said; "but all new homes are not sweet homes—there's no sweetness that will last where the barrel, the bottle, and the spirit-flask play a trio of discords: they'll drown all the harmonies of harp and piano. Promise me two things, my child;" he added, abruptly.

"What are they?" asked Mary, timidly and tearfully.

"Just these: promise me to become a pledged abstainer; and promise me that you'll never marry a man that loves the drink."

Poor Mary burst into tears, but her mother came to her aid, and said:

"I don't quite see what good Mary's signing the pledge will do. She has taken neither beer nor wine for some time past, so that she does all that is needed in the way of example."

"No, she does not, madam, if you'll excuse my being so blunt. She just does not do what will make her example *tell*. Power for good comes through combination; the devil knows it well enough, and he gets drunkards to band together in clubs; and worldly people band together in clubs, and back one another up and concentrate their forces. All who see the curse and misery of the drink should sign, and not stand apart as solitary abstainers; they won't do the same good; it is by uniting together that the great work is done by God's blessing. A body of Christian abstainers united in the same work, and bound by the same pledge, attract others, and give them something to lean on and cling to: and that is one reason why we want children to combine in Bands of Hope. Why, I've seen a man light a fire with a piece of glass, but how did he do it? Not by putting the fuel under one ray of the sun; not by carrying it about from place to place in the sunshine; but by gathering, with the help of the glass, all the little rays together into one hot bright focus. And so we want to gather together the power and influence of total abstainers in Total Abstinence Societies and Bands of Hope, by their union through the pledge as a common bond. We want to set hearts on fire with a holy love that shall make them burn to rescue poor slaves of the drink from their misery and ruin. Won't you help? Can you hold back? Are not souls perishing by millions through the drink, and is any sacrifice too dear to make, any cross too heavy to take up in such a cause?"

The old man had risen, and was walking up and down the room with great swinging strides. Then he stopped abruptly and waited for an answer.

"I'm sure," said Mrs Franklin, "we would both sign if it could do any real good."

"It *will* do good, it *must* do good: sign now;" he produced a pledge-book: "no time like the present."

The signatures were made, and then Mr Tankardew, clasping his thin hands together, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, offered a short emphatic prayer that God would bless and strengthen these His servants, and enable them by His grace to be a blessing to others as pledged abstainers. And then he turned again to Mary, and said:

"You have given me the one promise; will you give me the other? Will you promise me that you will never knowingly marry a man who loves the drink?"

Mary buried her face in her hands. A few moments, and no one spoke.

"Hear me, my child," cried the old man, again beginning to pace the room with measured strides; "you are dear to me, very dear, for you're the image of one lost to me years ago, long weary years ago. I cannot bear to see you offered as another victim on the altar of the Drink-Moloch: he has had victims enough: too many, too many. Do you wish to wither into a premature grave? Do you wish to see the light die out of your mother's smile? Then marry a drink-worshipper. Do you wish to tremble every time you hear the footstep of the man who has turned 'sweet home' into a shuddering prison? then marry a drink-worshipper. Do you wish to see little children hide the terror of their eyes in your lap and tremble at the name of father? Then marry a drink-worshipper. Stay, stay, I'm an old fool to break out in this way, and scare you out of your wits;" for Mary and her mother were both sobbing bitterly: "forgive me, but don't forget me; there, let us change the subject."

But Mary had checked her sobs, and, rising up calm and beautiful in her tears, she laid her hand lovingly on the old man's arm, and said, gently but firmly:

"Dear old friend, thank you for what you have said. I promise you that never will I knowingly marry one who loves intoxicating drinks."

"God bless you, my child. You have taken a load off the old man's heart, and off your mother's too, I know."

Would Mary keep her word? She was soon to be put to the test. Though Mark hesitated to propose to Mary Franklin, his mother had no scruples on the subject. He had now come to man's estate, and she wished him to marry; specially she wished him to marry Mrs Franklin's daughter, as Mary would enjoy a nice little income when she came of age, and Mark's prospects were cloudy enough as far as anything from his father was concerned. Besides, she hoped that marrying Mary would steady her son—a favourite scheme with mothers of drunkards. As for Mary's own peace or happiness, she never gave them a thought. The experiment would be something like caging a tiger and a lamb together for the purpose of subduing the tiger's ferocity; pleasant enough for the tiger, but simply destruction to the lamb. However, Mrs Rothwell pressed Mark to propose, so he yielded after a faint resistance, and now watched for his

opportunity.

It was a sweet July evening: the sun was near his setting, and was casting long shadows across the lawn at the back of "The Shrubbery." Mrs Franklin was sitting on a garden seat reading, her attention divided between her book and the glowing tints of a bed of flowers all ablaze with variegated beauty. A little shaded walk turned off near this seat into the kitchen garden, which was separated from the flower garden in this quarter by a deep ravine, at the bottom of which ran a trout stream. The ravine was crossed by a rustic bridge. Mr John Randolph had been calling at the house with some music, and, being now looked upon more in the light of a friend than an instructor, had the privilege of making a short cut to the turnpike road over this foot bridge and through the kitchen garden. Mark Rothwell also usually availed himself of this more direct approach to the house. On the present occasion the two young men met in the kitchen garden, and passed each other by without recognition, Mark hurrying forward to make his proposal, his already intense excitement inflamed by strong drink, which he had taken with less caution than on his ordinary visits to "The Shrubbery"; John Randolph lingering on his way in a somewhat discontented mood, which was not improved by the sight of Mark. Suddenly the stillness was broken by a loud scream and cry for help: it was Mary Franklin's voice. Both the young men rushed towards the bridge, and beheld a sight which filled them with dismay. Mary had strolled from her mother's side to the little foot bridge, and, filled with sorrowful thoughts, leant against the rustic parapet. The woodwork, which was inwardly decayed, gave way beneath her weight; she tried to recover herself but in vain, and fell over the side of the bridge, still, however, managing to keep herself from plunging into the stream by clinging to a creaking fragment of the broken rails. Her dress also helped to stay her up, having become entangled with the woodwork. Mark reached the bridge first, but was so confused by drink and excitement that he scarcely knew what he was doing, when he felt himself flung aside by the strong arm of John Randolph, who sprang forward, and stooping down endeavoured to raise the poor terrified girl, but for a few moments without success: indeed his own strength began to fail, and it seemed as if both must be precipitated into the stream, if assistance had not come



THE GARDENER HEARING THE CRIES HURRIED UP, AND, LENDING HIS POWERFUL HELP, MARY WAS DELIVERED FROM HER PERIL.—P. 103.

from another quarter.

The gardener hearing the cries hurried up, and, lending his powerful help, Mary was delivered from her peril, and was carried, fainting and bruised, into the house by her two rescuers, before Mark Rothwell had fairly recovered himself from the fall which John Randolph had given him in his haste. But now, boiling with wrath and vexation, Mark made his way to the front door, and disregarding in the blindness of his passion the sight of Mary just recovering consciousness, and of Mrs Franklin who was bending over her in mingled grief and thankfulness, he turned furiously upon John, who was just retiring, and shaking his fist in his face, cried out:

"How dare you interfere with me, sir? I'll not put up with this insolence from my sisters' discarded music-master."

The face of the other flushed crimson for a moment, then with unruffled voice he replied:

"Better, Mr Mark, to be a master of music and of one's self, than a slave of the drink. I wish you good evening."

Chapter Nine.

The Crisis.

Several weeks had passed by after the accident and timely rescue, weeks of anxious watching and tender nursing, before Mary Franklin was sufficiently recovered from the shock and injuries she had received to appear again among her friends. Many had been the inquiries made by Mark and Mr Tankardew, and once or twice by John Randolph.

It was on a calm Sabbath morning that mother and daughter first walked beyond their own grounds, and made their way to the little village church. Public thanks were offered that day for Mary's wonderful preservation, and many a loving eye looked through tears at the pale, serene face of her who had been so mercifully rescued. Was Mark Rothwell there?—no; but there was one who could not help gazing for a few moments, with a deeper sentiment than admiring pity, at the fair young girl, as the words of holy praise "for the late mercies vouchsafed unto her" were uttered by the minister: it was John Randolph. They met after service at the gate of the churchyard, and the young man having expressed his heartfelt congratulations, after a moment's hesitation offered Mary his arm, which she gently declined. A slight shade of mingled shame, sadness, and annoyance clouded his face for a moment, and as quickly passed away. Mary was struggling to say something to him expressive of her gratitude, but before she could put it into shape he was gone.

The next day brought Mr Tankardew to "The Shrubbery." The old man drew Mary to him in the fulness of his heart, and blessed her, calling her his child. "Well, what have the doctors made of you?" he asked, rather abruptly.

"Made of me?" asked Mary, laughing.

"Yes, made of you, they never could make anything *of* me or *by* me; but what have they made of *you*?"

"You puzzle me," replied the other.

"Did they put labels on all their physic bottles?"

"My dear sir," interposed Mrs Franklin, "I'm thankful to say that our doctor has prescribed little else than rest and tonics."

"And were the tonics labelled?"

"Oh! I understand you now. Mary has not broken her pledge, she would take no wine."

"Excellent girl! Of course she was ordered wine?"

"Oh! Yes; and ale or porter too. The doctor almost insisted on it."

"Of course he did; they always do. Ah! Well! Brave girl! You said no."

"Yes, I felt convinced that I should do as well without beer or wine, and I have had no cause to regret that I did not take them."

"Bravo! You'll *never* regret it. You must help us to fight the doctors: they mean well, some of them; but most of them are building up the palace of intemperance faster than we can pull it down. 'The doctor ordered it;' that's an excuse with thousands to drown their souls in drink. I wonder if they'd swallow a shovelful of red hot coals if the doctor ordered it?"

Summer had now given place to autumn; it was a bright September day when the above conversation took place. When Mr Tankardew rose to go, Mrs Franklin and Mary volunteered to accompany him a little way. So they went forth, and a sweet and pleasant sight it was, the hale, grey-haired veteran still full of fire, yet checking his steps to keep pace with the young girl's feeble tread: she, all gentleness and sober gladness, and her mother happy in the abiding trust of a believing heart.

They passed out of the grounds across a lane thickly shaded by trees, whose foliage was beginning to change its summer hue for the gorgeous varieties of autumnal colouring. Then they followed a winding path that skirted a wide sea of wheat, which rose and fell in rustling waves, disclosing now and again bright dazzling gleams of the scarlet poppy. At the end of this field was a stile leading into the highroad to Hopeworth. Here they paused, and were just about to part, when the sound of a horse's feet in rapid but very irregular motion arrested their attention. The animal and his rider soon came into view, the latter evidently keeping his seat with difficulty. There was plainly a struggle of some kind going on between the brute and the *rational* being who was mounted on him, and while drawing the reins tight with one hand, was belabouring the poor creature about the head most unmercifully with a heavy hunting whip. The horse not appreciating the advantages of this treatment at the hands of its *intellectual* owner, was resisting by a shuffling, remonstrating sort of gallop; while his rider, who was evidently a practised horseman, seemed to stick to his saddle by a kind of instinct, having little else to guide him, for his hat was completely shaken down over his eyes.

Mr Tankardew's indignation was kindled in a moment.

"The wretch! The drunken beast!" he cried; "serve him right if his horse pitches him head foremost into the first ditch with any dirty water in it."

On came the contending pair, the man swaying from side to side, but nevertheless marvellously retaining his seat. At



"THE ANIMAL SWERVED, AND ALMOST UNSEATED HIS TORMENTOR, WHO, HOWEVER, RECOVERED HIMSELF, BUT IN DOING SO LOST HIS HAT."—p. 108.

the sight of the ladies, or at a sudden movement forward of Mr Tankardew, the animal swerved and almost unseated his tormentor, who, however, recovered himself, but in doing so lost his hat, as the poor beast again plunged forward with his almost unconscious burden. The horseman took no notice of his loss, nor did he see who were the spectators of his sinful degradation, but to them he was fully revealed: it was Mark Rothwell. Another minute and he was out of sight.

Mary sank, with a bitter cry, into her mother's arms, while Mr Tankardew sprang forward to support them both. In a moment or two, however, the ladies had recovered themselves, and turned homewards. The old man saw that they would prefer to be alone, so, with a kind and courteous farewell, he made his way with slow strides towards the town.

"Humph!" he muttered to himself; "'Good entertainment for man and beast,' that's what they put over some of these alcohol shops. I'd like to know which was the beast just now. Entertainment! Ay, very entertaining, such a sight to the devil and his angels. O miserable drink! Haven't you drowned souls enough yet?"

Two days after this disgraceful exposure of himself, Mark Rothwell made an early call at "The Shrubbery." He was utterly ignorant of his having been seen in his drunkenness by Mrs Franklin and her daughter, and was scrupulously sober on the present occasion, and full of good resolutions, as habitual drunkards very commonly are after an outbreak of more than usual violence. He was quite convinced—at least he was enjoying a good deal of cheerful self-congratulation on the supposed conviction—that he never would exceed again; so in the strength of this conviction, he entered the room where Mary and her mother were sitting, with a confident step, though he could not quite keep down every feeling of misgiving. Still, it never occurred to him that Mary could possibly refuse him. He had too high an opinion of himself: he was such a general favourite and so popular, that he felt sure any young lady of his acquaintance would esteem herself honoured by the offer of his hand. He was well aware, it is true, that Mary had a horror of drunkenness; but he flattered himself, first, that he could persuade her that he meant to be sober for the future, and a total abstainer too if she required it; and then, that he had got a sufficient hold upon her heart, or at any rate regard, to make her willing to accept him without any stipulations rather than lose him. Strong in these impressions, he had now come over to make a formal proposal. The manner, however, of mother and daughter disturbed him; something he saw was amiss; there was a sadness and constraint in the words of both which distressed and embarrassed him. After a brief conversation on commonplace topics Mary rose hastily and left the room. Mark hesitated, but feeling that he must seize the opportunity, he at once asked Mrs Franklin's permission to avow his attachment to her daughter.

A long and painful pause: broken, at last, by Mrs Franklin's reply, that she could not advise her daughter to encourage his addresses.

Mark was thunderstruck! For several minutes surprise and mortification kept him silent. At last he exclaimed:

"But what does Mary wish herself? We've known each other so long; she knows I love her, she must know it. I'm sure she would not refuse me; may I not see her? May I not have 'yes,' or 'no,' from her own lips?"

"I will ask her," was the reply; and poor Mark was left for half an hour to his own not very agreeable reflections. At the end of that time Mrs Franklin returned, with a sealed letter in her hand.

"Mary does not feel equal to seeing you now," she said, "and indeed I could not recommend her doing so at present. She sends you this letter instead; do not read it now," for Mark was tearing it open, "but wait till you can give it your calm and full attention."

Mark would have remonstrated, but Mrs Franklin's quiet decision restrained him; he flung himself out of the house, and on reaching the highway, burst open the envelope and read as follows:—

"Dear Mark,—We have always been friends, and I hope shall remain so; but we can never be anything more to one another. I have solemnly resolved in God's sight that I will never marry a drunkard, and I never will. I was witness to your ill-usage of your poor horse the other day, when you were intoxicated; I cannot forget it; my mind is made up, I cannot alter it, and my dear mother entirely approves of my decision. I thank you for your offer, and pray that you may have grace given you to forsake the sin which has made it impossible that there can ever be more than a feeling of sincere interest and kindness towards yourself, from yours truly,—

"Mary Franklin."

Mark Rothwell tore the letter, when he had glanced through it, into bits, dashed them on the ground, and, with loud imprecations, stamped on them. There was a fire in his heart, a mad desire for revenge; he was, what drunkards must be, essentially selfish. Wounded vanity, disappointed affection, bitter jealousy, were the fuel to that fire. He had no thought now of remonstrance with Mary: he had no *wish* to remonstrate: his one great burning desire was to be revenged. He rushed home, but found little to cheer him there. For months past a cloud had hung over "The Firs," which had become denser and darker every day. And now it was come abroad that Mr Rothwell was bankrupt. It was too true: the reckless expenditure of Mark, and the incautious good nature of Mr Rothwell, which had led him, under the influence of free living, to engage in disastrous speculations, had brought ruin on the miserable family. A few more weeks and "The Firs" was untenanted.

But, in the midst of all this darkness, there shone forth a ray of heavenly light.

It was near midnight of the day when the sale of Mr Rothwell's effects had taken place at "The Firs." A candle twinkled still in the cottage of Mrs Forbes, for there was work to be sent home early on the morrow, and neither lateness nor weariness might suspend their anxious toil. Lame Sally and her mother had been talking over, what was in everyone's mouth and thoughts, the sad downfall of the Rothwells. They saw God's hand in it, but they did not rejoice; they had found their Saviour true to His word, and enjoyed a peace in casting their care on Him which they knew all the wealth of the world could not have given them. Only one thing they still prayed for which the Lord had not yet granted: Jim, poor Jim! But what was that? A footstep: how their hearts beat! Could it be the old familiar tread? Yes; Jim, but no longer drunken, gambling, prodigal Jim, was next moment at his mother's feet, and a minute after with his arms round his sister's neck. And there was weeping, but not for sorrow, in that cottage, and there was joy before the angels of heaven over a repentant sinner. Jim was come back. A mother's and sister's prayers had reached him and drawn him home. He was sober now: he was a pledged abstainer: he had brought his pay in his hand and love in his heart; and that night, while the shadows lay thick around the deserted mansion of "The Firs," and not even the wail of sorrow broke the stillness, there was light and music and peace in that humble cottage; the light of love, the music of thanksgiving, and "the peace of God which passeth understanding."

Chapter Ten.

Desperate Doings.

It is not to be supposed that Mary Franklin could mourn very deeply the departure of Mark Rothwell. Recent events had worn out the old impressions of tenderness. All that was bright and attractive in Mark had melted away before the scorching, withering flame of alcohol. She had heard his cruel taunts to her preserver on the evening of her rescue; she had seen him shamefully intoxicated when ill-using his poor horse. Could she cherish love or tenderness for such a being as this? Impossible! She was thankful to forget him. O misery! Why do so many of the good and noble frown upon those who would keep the intoxicating cup altogether out of the hands of the young? What do the young lose by never tasting it? Not health, not cheerfulness, not self-respect, not self-control. No! And what do they gain by tasting? Too often, habits of ruinous self-indulgence; too often a thirst which grows with years; too often a withered manhood or womanhood, and a decrepit and dishonoured old age.

October was drawing to its close: nothing had been heard of the Rothwells, and their old dwelling was now occupied by another tenant. John Randolph's visits to "The Shrubbery" began to be more frequent, and were certainly not unacceptable. Gratitude to him for her rescue forbade Mary's repelling him; and, indeed, the more she and her mother came to know him, the more they learnt to value his manly and Christian character. They began likewise to perceive that he was more than he seemed to be. Mr Tankardew had given them to understand latterly that he was their equal both in birth and fortune. A mystery there was about him, it was true; but the veil was now getting so thin that they could both see pretty distinctly through it, but were content to wait for the proper time of its withdrawal. And so it was felt by all that, in time, John Randolph and Mary Franklin would be drawn together by a closer bond than that of esteem and respect, but no one as yet gave outspoken expression to this conviction.

Things were thus hanging in no unpleasing suspense, when, in the twilight of an October evening, two men of rather suspicious appearance might have been seen climbing the paling *fence* at the back of "The Shrubbery." Scarcely had one of them reached the top, when a third person approached, at first hastily; then he suddenly checked himself, and cautiously crept along, so as to keep himself out of the sight of the two others who were climbing into the grounds. This third person was John Randolph, who had lately left "The Shrubbery," and had come round by the road at the back, to call, by Mrs Franklin's request, on a poor sick cottager in the village. The road in this part was lonely, and the

trespassers evidently imagined themselves unobserved. The first who scaled the palings was a stoutish, middle-aged man: but who was the other? Randolph's heart beat violently with a terrible suspicion. Did he know this second figure? He could not be quite sure, for he was afraid to approach too near; but he was almost convinced that he had seen him before. When fairly over the fence, both men crept along as quietly as possible under the shelter of a large bank of evergreens. He who had climbed over last led the way, and was plainly well acquainted with the grounds; he was a much younger man than his companion, and seemed scarcely sober, yet without having lost self-possession and the knowledge of what he was doing. John waited till they were fairly out of hearing, and then himself rapidly and noiselessly followed them towards the house under cover of the laurels. It was now getting very dusk, but he could manage to track them till they had reached some outhouses, along the wall of which they crawled, crouching down. And now they had arrived at the rear of the house, and stood in shadow opposite a back passage window. Randolph crept silently up and squeezed himself behind a huge water-butt, where he was perfectly concealed, and could overhear part of the conversation now hurriedly held between the two burglars, if such they were.

"You're sure the man does not sleep in the house?" asked the elder man.

"Sure," replied the second, in a husky whisper. John Randolph felt pretty certain that he knew the voice, but he hardly dared think it.

"Where's the plate chest?"

"Don't know: most likely in the pantry."

John was now confident that he knew the speaker.

"Hush!" whispered the elder man, fiercely, "this passage window 'll do: it won't take much to prise it open: you'll look after the women."

"Trust *me* for that," muttered the other; and Randolph thought he heard a click, as of the cocking of a pistol.

"Hush, you fool!" growled the older burglar, with an oath: then there was a few moments' silence, and the two crept back. They sat down under the shelter of some large shrubs, with their backs to John, who could only just make them out from his hiding-place, for it was now getting quite dark. A little while, and they rose, and passed very near their unsuspected watcher, who could just catch the words "Two o'clock," as they made their way back to the fence. A few moments more, and they were clear of the grounds.

John Randolph's mind was made up in a moment what to do. Having cautiously followed the two men into the road, and ascertained that they were not lurking anywhere about "The Shrubbery," he hurried off at once to Hopeworth, and communicated what he had seen and heard to the police. He was very anxious that no unnecessary alarm should be given to Mrs Franklin or Mary, and that they should be kept, if possible, in ignorance of the whole matter till the danger was over; so he resolved to accompany the constables, who, with the superintendent, were preparing to encounter the housebreakers. It was presumed, from what he had overheard, that an attempt was to be made on "The Shrubbery" that very night, and that the two men seen by John Randolph were only part of a larger gang. Help was therefore procured, and about one o'clock a party of a dozen, including John, all disguised in labourers' clothes, had noiselessly scaled the fence in different parts by two and two, and, recognising one another by a password previously agreed upon, were soon clustered together under some dense shrubs not far from the passage window before mentioned. It was a tranquil morning, but very cloudy. All was deep stillness in the house. Little did Mrs Franklin and her daughter think, as they read together before parting for the night those comforting words, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them," that such foes and such protectors were so close at hand. But they laid them down in perfect peace, and their heavenly Father's loving power was as a wall of fire about them. Patiently did the watchers listen from their hiding-place to every sound. Two o'clock, at last, rang out clear from the great timepiece on the stairs; they could hear it distinctly outside. What was that sound? Only the distant barking of a fox. But now there are other sounds. One, two, three, at length six men in all have crept to the part of the yard opposite the back door. All paused and looked carefully round: everything seemed safe.

"Well," said one who appeared to be a leader, "it does not seem as if we need be over particular: there's neither dog nor man about, and the women won't *do* much. Where's the crowbar?"

"Here."

Just at this moment a bright ray of light flashed out along the passage, and a female figure could be seen crossing the landing. The housebreakers shrunk back.

"It will not do," said the leader, half aloud; "they've got scent of us somehow: pr'aps they've some men inside to help them, we'd better be off."

"Fools! Cowards!" exclaimed a younger man, in a fierce whisper, as the others began to slink away; "are you afraid of a parcel of women? But I'll not be baffled: she's there:" and he raised a pistol, and pointed it towards the figure which had descended close to the passage window with the light in her hand, and was trying to peer into the darkness outside. His companion pulled down his arm with a savage imprecation. All was still for a few minutes, and the female retired to the landing and then disappeared. The burglars hesitated, when, just at the moment of their indecision, one of the police imitated the low growling of a dog close at hand. Instantly the whole gang took to their heels, closely followed by the constables. No shout had been raised, no word had been spoken, for John Randolph had been most anxious that the thieves should be captured without alarming the ladies. And now in the darkness, pursuers and pursued were scattered in different directions. John sprang after the young man who had raised the pistol, and succeeded in grappling with him before he could mount the fence. The clouds were now dispersed, and there was light enough for one to recognise another. Randolph could not doubt; the intended murderer was Mark Rothwell.

Fiercely did the two young men strive together, and at last both fell, Mark undermost; and, relaxing



"JOHN WAS RISING TO HIS FEET, WHEN THE OTHER DREW A PISTOL, BUT BEFORE HE COULD FIRE HIS ADVERSARY HAD TURNED IT ASIDE."—P. 122.

his hold, John was rising to his feet, when the other drew a pistol, but before he could fire his adversary had turned it aside; it went off, wounding the unhappy young man who held it. Randolph drew back in dismay, hearing the injured man's involuntary groan, but in another instant Mark had drawn a second pistol and fired. The ball grazed the other's forehead, and he staggered back stupefied. When he recovered himself Mark had disappeared, and never from that night was heard of or seen in Hopeworth or its neighbourhood. Near the part of the fence where the scuffle took place were afterwards found marks of a horse's hoofs, and traces of blood. The miserable young man contrived to get clear away: the rest of the gang were all captured by the police.

The day after this adventure old Mr Tankardew and John Randolph paid a visit together to "The Shrubbery." Of course the wildest tales were in circulation, the central point in most being the murder of Mrs Franklin and her daughter. "I trust," said the old man to Mary and her mother, "that you have suffered nothing but a little fright. All's well that ends well, and I'm thankful that my young friend here was able to be of some service; you see, God can take care of His own."

"It has been so, indeed," replied Mrs Franklin; "Mary could not sleep, she cannot tell why; she felt restless and uneasy, and just about two o'clock she was crossing to my room, when she thought she heard some unusual sounds in the yard. She looked out of the passage window, but could see nothing; then she heard a sort of scuffle, and, after that, all was still; and, though we were rather alarmed, we heard nothing more. But this morning has brought us strange tidings, and I find that we are again indebted to our kind young friend here for help in time of need, and that, too, I fear, at his own imminent risk."

"Don't mention this," said the young man; "it has been a privilege to me to have been able to render this assistance. I am only too thankful that I was put in the way of discovering what might have otherwise been a very serious business. But we must see that you are better protected for the future."

"True, true, John," interrupted Mr Tankardew, smiling; "I see I must put in a word. My dear child, Miss Franklin seems more willing than able to speak just now. Yes; let me make a clean breast of it. Let me introduce our young friend in a new character, John Randolph Tankardew, my only son, my only surviving child." His voice trembled, and then he added, "He has twice been the protector of my dear adopted daughter, let me join their hands together as a pledge that he may shortly obtain a better title to be her protector while life shall last."

And so, placing the half-shrinking hand of Mary in the young man's stronger grasp, he held them together with a fervent blessing.

"And now," he added, as they sat in a loving group, too full of tearful peace to wish to break the charmed silence by hasty words, "now let me tell my story, and unravel the little tangle which has made me a mystery to my neighbours, and a burden to my friends. But all that is past; there are brighter days before us now."

Chapter Eleven.

Mr Tankardew's Story Begun.

"You must know, dear friends," began the old man sadly, "that I'm a wiser man now than I was once. Not that there's much wisdom to boast of now; only I have learnt by experience, and he is a sharp schoolmaster.

"I was born to trust others; it was misery to me to live in distrust and suspicion; I couldn't do it. People told me I was a fool; it was true, I knew it, but I went on trusting. David said in his haste, 'all men are liars.' I said in my haste, or rather my folly, 'all men are true.' They might lie to others, but I thought they couldn't, or wouldn't, or didn't lie to me. At any rate I'd trust them; it was so sad to think that a being made in God's image could go about wilfully deceiving others. I'd take a brighter view of my fellow-men and women. I never could abide your shrewd, knowing people, who seemed to be always living with a wink in their eyes, and a grin on their lips, as if they believed in nobody and nothing but their own sharpness. I loathed them, and I loathe them still. But I wasn't wise. I had to smart for it. I had plenty of money when I came of age, and I had plenty of friends, or rather acquaintances, who knew it. But I was shy, and not over fond of many companions; my weakness wasn't in that direction. I had sense enough to see through your common gold-hunters. I was never over fond of sugar-candy; coarse flattery made me sick, and I had no taste for patching up the holes in the purses of profligates and spendthrifts. I never was a worshipper of money, but I knew its value, and wasn't disposed to make ducks and drakes of it, nor partridges and pheasants either. So the summer flies, after buzzing about me a little, flew off to sunnier spots; all except one. He puzzled me a bit at first, but I blamed myself for having a shadow of suspicion of him. All seemed so open about him, open hands, open eyes, open brow; he wound himself round my heart before I knew where I was. Mine was a fair estate (it will be yours one day, Mary, my child, I trust; John's and yours together). I'd lived away from home many years before I came into it, for both my parents died while I was young, and when I came of age, my nearest relations were only distant. I never had brother nor sister. When I came to reside on my property the neighbours called, and I returned their calls, and it didn't go much beyond that. They thought me cold and unfeeling, but they were mistaken. But I must go back and take up my dropped thread. I said there was one man who got hold of my heart. I had a good stout fence of prejudices, and an inner paling of reserve about that heart of mine, but he contrived to climb over both, and get inside. I could have done anything for him, but he did not seem to want anything but my affection; so I thought. He had a sister: well, what shall I say? I'm a poor, weak, old fool; it is all past and gone now. I must go straight on; but it is like ploughing up my heart into a thousand deep furrows with my own hand. But; well, he had a sister; I'll not tell you her name, nor his either: at least not now. He brought her with him to call on me one day. She had never been in the neighbourhood before, for her brother was only a recent settler in the place. I was charmed with her; the more so because she was so like her brother, so bright and so open; so thoroughly transparent. She beamed upon me like a flood of sunshine, and gilded my cloudy reserve with her own radiance, so that I shone out myself in her company; so they told me, and I believed it. I was young then, you'll remember. I wasn't the wrinkled old pilgrim that I am now. We got attached to one another, it would seem, at once; others may *fall* in love; *we leapt* into it; I never thought to ask myself whether she loved God. I was content to know that she loved *me*. I was aware that I had a heart, but at that time I hadn't learnt that I had a soul. Well, my friend (shall I drop the 'r,' and call him 'fiend'? 'Twould be truer); he did all he could to hasten on our marriage. He did it very quietly, so openly, too. He was so radiant with joy at the thoughts of my coming happiness. 'She was such a sister,' he said, 'she would be such a wife to me.' I never had any misgivings but once, and then the shadow was but as the passing of a white cloud before summer's noontday sunshine. I was going from home for a week, but unexpected business detained me for another day. I walked over to my future brother-in-law's in the afternoon. It was summer time. I went in, as was my habit, by the garden door, and was crossing the lawn, when I heard sounds of wild laughter proceeding from a little summer-house; they were sounds of boisterous and almost idiotic mirth. There was a duet of merriment, in which a male and female each took a part. I hardly knew what I was doing, or whether to go back or advance. As I hesitated, all was hushed. I saw a female figure dart like lightning into the house, and then my friend (I must call him so for want of a better title) came forward, and holding out both his hands to me, said 'Welcome, welcome, this is an unexpected pleasure. I thought you were far away on your journey before now; my sister and I have been almost dying with laughter over a book lent to us by a friend. I do think I never read anything so irresistibly ludicrous in all my life.' I hardly knew what to say in reply, I was so completely taken aback. I was turning, however, towards the summer-house in which I just caught a glance of a table with a bottle and glasses on it, when my companion, catching my arm in his, hurried me away to another part of the garden, where, he said, he was going to make some improvements, about which he must have my judgment and suggestions. As we afterwards went into the house, we again passed the summer-house, but the glasses and bottle were gone. We entered into one of the sitting-rooms, and the servant came to tell us that her mistress had just been sent for to see a poor sick cottager, who wanted her immediately. This led her brother to break out into raptures about his sister's benevolence, self-denial, and charity! Indeed, I never heard him so eloquent on any subject before. I left, however, in a little while, for he seemed unnaturally restless and excited during my stay, and a cloud lowered upon me all the way home, but it had melted away by the next morning. But I must hasten on. We were married soon after this, and I settled a handsome allowance on my wife for her own private use. She had no parents living, but had kept house for another brother before she came to reside in our neighbourhood. I wished to suppose myself happy as a married man, but, somehow or other, I was not. My wife made large professions of affection, but, spite of myself, I mistrusted them. Her brother, too, seldom came now to see me, unless he had some private business with his sister; and they were often closeted together alone for an hour or more. Then she would come out to me, radiant with smiles, and full of excitement; and her brother would rattle on, hurrying from one topic to another, so as to leave me no power to collect my thoughts, or shape any questions which I was anxious to ask him. I am given to trust, as I have told you, and ever shall be, if I live to be a dozen centuries old. Still, I couldn't help having my doubts, my grievous doubts. Well, one morning, my brother-in-law called; he seemed agitated, and in much distress, saying that he must give up his house and join his brother, with whom he was in partnership; as he found his presence was required for the investigation, and, he feared it might be, the winding-up of their affairs. I pitied him, and offered him help. He refused it almost with indignation, but I pressed it, and he accepted a loan, merely as a loan, he said, of a thousand pounds, for which I gave him a cheque on the spot. With tears in his eyes, and a warm pressure of the hand, he was gone. I never saw him again. A *few* mornings after this; it was about six months after we were married; my wife and I were sitting at breakfast when she threw a paper to me across the table, saying, 'I suppose you'll see to that.' It was a bill for a considerable amount, contracted by herself before our marriage, and for articles which were certainly no part of a lady's toilet or wardrobe, nor could be of any possible use

to one of her sex. I was astonished; but she treated the matter very coolly, or appeared to do so. When I asked for an explanation, she avoided my eye, and turned the matter off; and when I pressed her on the subject, she said, 'Well, it is no use my entering into explanations now; you'll find it all right.' I was greatly disturbed, for there was something in her manner that showed me she was ill at ease, though she endeavoured to wear a nonchalant air. There was a wild light, too, in her eyes, which distressed and almost alarmed me, and a suspicion came over me which almost made me faint. She left the breakfast table abruptly, and I saw no more of her till luncheon time; but when I went to my library, I found a packet on my table which I had not noticed there before. I opened it; it was full of unpaid bills, all made out to my wife in her maiden name, and most, indeed nearly all of them, for articles unsuited for female use. A horrible suspicion flashed across my mind. Could it possibly be that these were her brother's debts: that he had got these articles in her name, and had had the bills sent in to her? And could it be that brother and sister had been in league together, and that he with all his assumption of openness and candour and large-heartedness, had entrapped me into this marriage that I might liquidate the debts of an abandoned and reckless profligate? And could it be, farther, (madden ing thought!) that the *whole* extravagance was not his, and that numerous unpaid accounts for wine and spirits were, partly, for what she had taken as well as her brother? Then I thought of the scene in the garden, of the wild laughter, of her sudden disappearance, of the signs of drinking in the summer-house. Oh! My heart turned sick; was I tricked, deceived, ruined in my peace for ever? I paced up and down my library, more like a lunatic than a sane man. Luncheon time came: we met: she threw herself into my arms, and wept and laughed and implored; but I felt that a drunkard was embracing me, and I flung her from me, and rushed out of the house. O misery! Whither should I go, what should I do? It was all too true: her brother was the basest of men: she did love *him*, I believe, it was the only unselfish thing about her. Well, I had to go back home; *home!* Vilest of names to me then! 'home, *bitter* home!' And yet I loved that poor guilty, fallen creature. There was a terrible light in her eyes as we sat opposite one another at dinner. We had to play a part before the footman. Oh! What a dreadful meal that was! I seemed to be feeding on ashes, and drinking wormwood. I felt as if every morsel would choke me. We spoke to one another in measured terms. Would the miserable farce of a dinner never be over? It came to an end at last. And then she came to me trembling and penitent, and, laying her head on my shoulder, wept till tears would fall no longer. She was sober then; she had taken nothing but water at dinner. She unburdened her heart to me (so I thought), and confessed all. She told me how she and her brother had been brought up, as children, in habits of self-indulgence, especially in having free access to the wine and spirits. She told me that she and her unworthy brother had been all in all to one another, that gambling and drink had brought him into difficulties, and that she had allowed him to run up accounts in her name. She declared that he really loved and valued me, and that the thought of hurrying on our marriage for any selfish object, was quite a recent idea, suggested by distress under pecuniary embarrassment. She asserted passionately that she truly loved me; she implored me to overlook the past, and promised, with solemn appeal to Heaven, that she would renounce the drink from that hour, and give me no more uneasiness. Ay, she promised; a drunkard's promise! Lighter than the lightest gossamer; brittle as the ice of an April morning. I believed her: did she believe herself? I fear not. But the worst was to come, the shadows were deepening, the storm was gathering. A year had passed over our wedded life, when a little girl was given to us. Every cord of my heart that had been untwined or slackened of late wound itself fast round that blessed little one."

Chapter Twelve.

Mr Tankardew's Story Finished.

"All was joy for a time. We called our little one Mary; it was a name I loved. I had not lived as a total abstainer; though, as I told you once, my mother, whom I can only recollect as a widow, had banished all intoxicants from our table. But I was young when she died, and I became, and continued for many years a moderate drinker. But now when our little girl was born, I had swept the house clear of all alcoholic drinks; we hadn't a drop in the place from cellar to attics, so I thought. And my wife agreed with me that our little one should never know the taste of the strong drink. We had not many friends, for I was shy and reserved still, and my home was my world and society; at least I wished it to be so. Sometimes I thought my wife strangely excited, it looked very like the old misery, but she solemnly declared that she never tasted anything intoxicating. I hoped she spoke the truth, even against the evidence of my senses. After a while she persuaded me that I wanted change, that I was rusting out in my loneliness. She would have me accept an invitation to a friend's house now and then: it would do me good. *She* was happy in her home, she said, only she should be happier still if she could see me gaining spirits by occasional intercourse with like-minded friends. Not that she wished me to leave her; it was for my own good she said it, and she should be delighting in the thoughts of the good it would do me, and should find abundance to cheer her in my absence, in the care of our darling child. She said all this so openly, so artlessly, that I believed her. I thought she might be right; so I went now and then from home for a few days, and, by degrees, more and more frequently. And my wife encouraged it. She said it did me so much good, and the benefit I reaped in improved health, spirits, and intelligence quite reconciled her to the separation. We went on so till our Mary was five years old; I could not say that my wife was ever manifestly intemperate, but painful suspicions hung like a black cloud over me. At last one summer's day, one miserable day: I can never forget it: I set out to pay a week's visit to a friend, who lived some ten miles distant from my home. I drove myself in a light, open carriage; my horse was young and rather shy. I was just going round a bend in the road, when a boy jumped suddenly over a hedge, right in front of us. Away went my horse at the top of his speed, and soon landed me in a ditch, and broke away, leaving the carriage with a fractured shaft behind him. I was not hurt myself, so I got assistance from the nearest cottage; and, having caught my horse, and found someone to whom I could trust the repairing of my vehicle, I walked home. It was afternoon when I arrived. I walked straight in through the back of the premises, and entered the dining-room; there was no one there. I was going to ring for one of the servants, when the door opened, and little Mary toddled (I ought rather to say tottered) up to me. Her mother was close behind her, but, at the sight of me, she uttered a wild cry, shut the door violently, and rushed upstairs. I had seen enough in her face: too much, too much! And the little child, our darling little Mary, what was amiss with her? Could it be? Had that cruel woman dared to do such a thing? Yes: it was so indeed: the little child was under the influence of strong drink; I drew the horrible truth from her by degrees. The mother had taught that little babe to like the exciting cup; she had sweetened and made it specially palatable. She had done this to make the child a willing

partaker in her sin, to bribe her to secrecy, and to use her as a tool for the gratifying of her own vile appetite. Thus was she deliberately poisoning the body and soul of her child, and training her in deceit, that she might league that little one, as she grew up, with herself in procuring the forbidden stimulant, and in deceiving her own father. O accursed drink, which can thus turn a mother into the tempter and destroyer of her own guileless and unsuspecting child! I rushed out of the room, and was about to hurry upstairs, but I shrank back shivering and heart-sick. Then I went up slowly and heavily: my bedroom door was bolted; so was the door of my wife's dressing-room; I came downstairs again, and, taking Mary by the hand, went into my library. There the storm of trouble did its work, for it drove me down upon my knees. I poured out my heart in strong crying to God; I owned that I had lived without Him, and that I had not loved nor sought Him. I prayed for pardon and a new heart, and that He would have mercy on my poor wife and child. As I knelt in my agony of supplication I felt two little hands placed on my own, then mine were gently pulled from me, and my precious little child, looking up in my face with streaming eyes, said, 'Papa, don't cry; dear papa, don't cry. I *will* be a good girl.' I pressed her to my heart, and blessed God that it was not yet too late. Before nightfall I had driven away with that dear child, and had placed her with a valued friend whom I could trust, one of the few who had ever visited at our house, a total abstainer, and, better still, a devoted Christian. My child had always loved her, and I felt that I could leave her in such hands with the utmost confidence. But I had a home still, in name at least, for all the sunshine had gone out of the word 'home' for me. I returned the next day to our childless house: where was the mother? She lay on the floor of her dressing-room, crushed in spirit to the dust. I raised her up; she would not look at me, but hid her face in her hands; her eyes were dry, she had wept away all her tears. I could not bear her grief, and I tried to comfort her; all might yet be well. Again she confessed all, her deceit, her heartlessness; but she laid it to the drink. True, she was in this a self-deceiver, but how terrible must be the power for evil in a stimulant which can so utterly degrade the soul, cloud the intellect, and benumb the conscience! Well, she poured forth a torrent of vows, promises, and resolutions for the future. I bade her turn them into prayers, but she did not understand me. However, there was peace for awhile: our Mary came home again, and I watched her with an unwearied carefulness. Another year brought us a son: he sits among us now: John Randolph we call him. There was a sort of truce till John was ten years old. I knew that my poor unhappy wife still continued to obtain strong drink, but she did not take it to excess to my knowledge, and it was never placed upon our table. I was myself, at this time, practically a total abstainer, but I had signed no pledge. I didn't see the use of it then, so I had not got my children to sign. My poor wife *professed* to take no alcoholic stimulants, yet I could not but know that she was deceiving herself. She was, alas! Too self-confident. She seemed to think that all danger of *excess* was now over, and that a white lie about taking none was no real harm, so long as it satisfied *me*; but it neither deceived nor satisfied me. At last, one winter's day, she proposed that John should drive her in her pony-carriage to the neighbouring village, where there was an old servant of ours who was ill, whom she wanted to see. The pony was a quiet one, and was used to John's driving, so I did not object, as I was very busy at the time, and could not therefore drive myself. It was very late before she came back; she had kept the poor boy at the cottage door nearly two hours, and when she returned to the carriage was so excited that he was in fear and trembling all the way home. That night his miserable mother lay hopelessly intoxicated on a sofa when I retired to my resting-*place*, for to rest I certainly did not retire. From that day she utterly broke down, and became lost to all shame; one appetite, one passion alone, possessed her; a mad thirst for the drink. We separated by mutual consent, and I made her an allowance sufficient to supply all her lawful wants. Alas! Alas! The sad end hurries on. She wrote to me for a larger allowance; I knew what she wanted it for, and I refused. She wrote again and I did not reply. Then she wrote to Mary with the same object. Of course, I need hardly tell you that the children remained with me. Poor dear Mary loved her mother dearly, and sent her all her own pocket money. I found it out, and forbade it for the future. Two more years passed by. From time to time I heard of my miserable wife; she was sinking lower and lower. At last, in the twilight of an autumn evening, as Mary was returning home alone, a wild-looking, ragged woman crept towards her with a strange, undecided step: it was her mother. She flung herself at her child's feet, imploring her, if she still had any love for her, to find her the means of gratifying her insatiable thirst. She must die, she said, if she refused her. Poor Mary, poor Mary! Terror-stricken, heart-broken, she spoke words of love, of entreaty, to that miserable creature; she urged her to break off her sin; she pointed her to Jesus for strength; she told her that she dared not supply her regularly with money, as she had promised me that she would not, and it would do her no good. The wretched woman slunk away without another word. Next day her body was found floating on the river; she had destroyed herself. Poor, dear Mary never looked up after that. She connected her mother's awful end with her own refusal to give her money for the drink, though there could be no blame to her: and so she faded away, my lovely child, and left me, ere another spring came round, for the land of eternal summers. I was heart-sick, hopeless; life seemed objectless; I gave way to despondency, and forgot my duty as a man and a Christian. I felt that I was no proper guide nor companion for poor John; so I sent him first to France, where he gained his skill as an artist and musician; and since then he has, by his own desire, been a traveller in distant lands. I let my house, and came over to Hopeworth, to be out of the way of everything and everybody that could remind me of the past. Yet, I could not forget. You noticed the vacant space in my sitting-room, where a picture should have been; that empty space reminded me of what might have been, had my wife, whose portrait should have been there, been a different wife to me. But light came at last. When I saw *you*, Mary my child, for the first time, I scarce knew what to say or think. You were, and are, the very image of my own loved and lost one, my Mary my beloved child; the portrait behind the panel is hers. I longed to have you for my own. I determined, however, to see what you were; I went to the juvenile party merely for that end. And then, when John came home unexpectedly, I resolved in my heart that, if I could bring it about, you *should* be my own dear child. So John and I talked it over; and John, who is a true branch from the old tree, a little crotchety or so, was resolved to win you in his own fashion; and, having learnt a little colonial independence, he wished to look at you a bit behind the scenes; so he would come before you, not as the heir of an eccentric old gentleman, with a good estate and plenty of money to speak for him, but as the travelled artist and music-master. And now, I think I've pretty well unravelled the greater part of the tangle; the rest you can easily smooth out for yourselves.

"So you see it has been 'nearly lost, but dearly won.' My child, Mary, you nearly lost old Esau's heart, when you seemed bent on throwing your own away; but you've won it, and won it dearly, like a dear good child. You nearly lost your peace to one who would soon have drowned it out of home, but you won it dearly and bravely, I know, at no little sacrifice. And John, my son, I once thought you'd nearly lost the noblest and best of wives; but you've won her, and dearly, too, but she's worth the price of a little stooping, ay, and of a great deal too. And old Esau Tankardew nearly lost his peace and his self-respect, in selfish unsanctified sorrow, but he has won something better than

respect, though it cost him a hard struggle; he has won a daughter who hates that drink which blotted out light and joy from the old man's home and heart; and he has won, through grace, a peace that passeth understanding, and can say, 'Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The End.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NEARLY LOST BUT DEARLY WON ***

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