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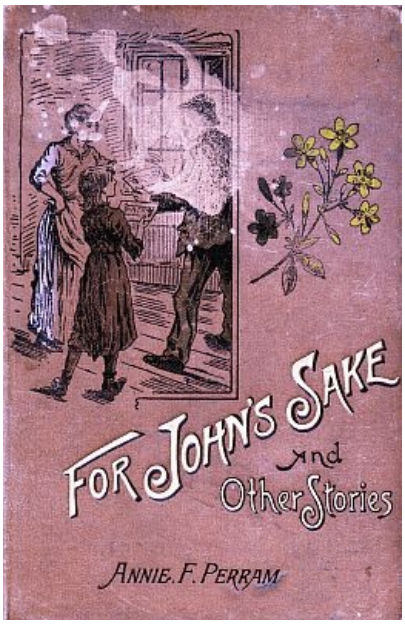

FOR JOHN'S SAKE; AND OTHER STORIES.

Frontispiece.

"Ruth advanced to the table, and with trembling hands put her full glass

down."—*Page 4*.

FOR JOHN'S SAKE

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

ANNIE FRANCES PERRAM.

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PREFACE.

IT is probable that many of these pages may be read with the comforting conviction that the scenes they depict and the lives they lightly sketch, in no way come within the range of possibility; but to any reader so little acquainted with the snares and perils, the misery and degradation that lay outside the pale of Total Abstinence, the assurance is tendered that the darkest pictures contained in this collection of stories are minutely faithful to life, and that the saddest incidents related have occurred under the personal observation, or within the knowledge of the writer.

A. F. P.

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FOR JOHN'S SAKE.

CHAPTER I.

AFRAID FOR HERSELF.

"I SAY, John."

"Well, Ruthie."

"Master's just rung, and he says he wants you and me to come upstairs together."

"What for, I wonder! Don't look so troubled, little woman;" and John, the well-built, broad-shouldered gardener, looked up with an unmistakable glance of affection at the somewhat clouded face of Ruth, the trim, neat parlour-maid, who had come into the conservatory to bring him the message from the dining-room. "I'll just wash my hands and be ready in a minute," he continued, following her into the kitchen. With much inward trepidation, Ruth, accompanied by John, entered the dining-room a few minutes later. [2]

Mr. and Mrs. Groombridge, their eldest son, who was a medical student; three daughters, and one or two younger boys were seated at the nearly finished dessert.

"Well, John, I dare say you wonder why we sent for you and Ruth; but the fact is, your mistress heard from cook this morning a piece of news which you have been sly enough to keep from us," said Mr. Groombridge. Ruth blushed violently, and withdrew a little behind John's burly figure.

"There's nothing to be ashamed of, Ruth; indeed, you've every reason to be proud and happy," added Mr. Groombridge, with a kind look and kinder tone. There was no mistaking the assent that was visible in Ruth's shy uplifted eyes. She was proud and happy, and she involuntarily moved a step nearer to John.

"We thought you would like to know, John," continued his master, "how really glad we are that you and Ruth have settled this little affair between you. You have both been good, faithful servants, and deserve to be 'happy ever after,' as the story-books say. Now we want to drink to your health and future happiness, and you must drink with us."

Mr. Groombridge poured out two glasses of wine, and handed them to John and Ruth.

"Your health and happiness, John and Ruth," he said, draining his own glass. [3]

"Your health and happiness, John and Ruth," repeated his wife and children, with their glasses to their lips.

"And when I go in for matrimony, John, may my choice be as wise as yours," added the eldest son, whose partiality for Ruth was no secret.

"No doubt you would like to choose some one who would be as ready as Ruth to fly at your beck and call, and think nothing too great a trouble to do for you, Master Harry," saucily remarked his younger sister Kate, in an aside.

"Hush, my dear; little girls of sixteen know nothing about such serious things," gravely responded Harry. Kate tossed her head, and was about to reply, when John spoke:

"I'm sure, sir," he began, "that Ruth and me owe our best thanks to you and mistress for your kindness in wishing us well, and if I may be bold enough to say so, sir, we find it our pleasure as well as our duty, to try and please so good and kind a master and mistress, and here's to your health and happiness for many a long day, and the young ladies', and Mr. Harry's too." And having performed a duty for himself and Ruth, John tossed off his wine in much the same fashion as his master.

"Come, Ruth, drink your wine," said Mrs. Groombridge, perceiving that the girl's glass remained untouched.

"Drink it, Ruth," said John in an undertone. [4]

"Come, don't be bashful, Ruth, we are all your friends," said Harry encouragingly. But Ruth advanced to the table, and with trembling hands put her full glass down. The rich colour that had dyed her cheeks a few minutes before had gone, and she was white to the lips, but her voice was

firm as she answered:

"Please, ma'am, I can't drink it."

"Not drink it! Why not, Ruth?"

"Because, ma'am, as soon as I was engaged to John, I signed the pledge, and determined I would never touch any intoxicating drink again."

Mr. Groombridge raised his eyebrows, and Harry gave a low whistle of astonishment.

"What a queer fancy! Perhaps you won't have any objection to giving your reason for taking such a step," said Mrs. Groombridge, with a slight hauteur of manner.

"Because—because,"—said Ruth hesitating, and then desperately proceeding; "because, ma'am, I want to do the best for John that I can, and I mean him to have a happy home, and never any reason to be ashamed of me." Ruth stopped suddenly.

"Well, well, that is very good and creditable, of course, but what has it all to do with not touching intoxicants?" impatiently asked Mr. Groombridge.

"Oh, sir, it has everything to do with it. If you knew what I do about the misery and want that has come to happy hearts and homes, just because the wife had got into the habit of taking too much drink, you would think so too. You know, sir, I was brought up in the town, and couldn't help seeing the curse that drink is. Sometimes the husband was the drinker, and sometimes both of them; and there was scarce a home about us that hadn't been ruined by drink; and so I made up my mind that if ever I had a home of my own, I would do my part towards keeping it free from such a curse, and for John's sake, I have signed the pledge, and for John's sake I must keep it, sir. I hope you and mistress will forgive me for refusing your wine." [5]

"Bravo, Ruth! you're a brick," cried Harry.

"Be quiet, my son," said his father, adding: "Well, Ruth, I honour your motive, but there are one or two points that I can't see at all. Surely, if you are moderate in your use of stimulant, it would be a blessing, and not a curse, for it is only the excessive use of intoxicants which render them so harmful."

"I can't argue about it, sir. I only know that every man and woman who is going down to a drunkard's grave was once moderate in the use of stimulants, and never had a thought of taking too much. I know that there are many who are never anything but moderate drinkers; but there's danger somewhere, and because I can't rightly say where it comes in, and perhaps shouldn't know when it did, I've put myself out of the way of it altogether." [6]

"That's woman's logic all the world over; but I would like to know why you cannot just for once take a glass of wine. You know it's good, and quite unlike the wretched stuff that ruins so many."

"I've promised not to take any kind of intoxicating drink, and I dare not break my promise, sir," said Ruth firmly.

Mr. Groombridge shrugged his shoulders and rose from the table.

"Wait a minute, John," he said, "we haven't heard what you think of this fancy of Ruth's."

"To tell the truth, I don't approve of it, sir. It's as good as saying that she hasn't any faith in herself, and expected to go to the bad, if she wasn't bound by a promise she'd put her name to," answered John in a tone of dissatisfaction.

"My views, exactly, John; besides, it's setting her judgment against yours, which I wouldn't think of allowing, even at this early juncture," said Mr. Groombridge, with a serio-comic expression.

"Oh, father, *you* wouldn't think of allowing, indeed, when only a few minutes ago, you declared that mother's judgment was ever so much better than yours, and that ever since you had known her, you had trusted to it more than to your own," cried Kate.

"My dear, your remark is quite irrelevant," and Mr. Groombridge dismissed the inconvenient topic with John and Ruth.

"Don't be angry with me, John; I couldn't do anything else," timidly said Ruth, as she followed John back to the conservatory. [7]

"I'm not pleased with you, Ruth, I must say. I should like the woman I have chosen to have so much self respect that she would feel it impossible to stoop to degrade herself, as you seem to think you could easily do."

"Oh, John, I thought you would understand me better than that, for you know so much more than I could tell master and mistress. Why, John, don't you know how the curse of drink blighted my own home, and made my early years a misery? Can I ever forget the nightly horror when my mother staggered home to rouse the neighbourhood with her drunken shouts and blasphemies? Can I forget the dear little ones I nursed while they pined away to sink into untimely graves? Can I forget my father's life-long bitterness and premature end? And if I could forget these things, how could I forget the dying despair, the loathing of her sin, and yet the unconquerable craving of disease that held my poor mother captive through her last hours!"

"Dear Ruthie, hush; don't recall those memories. A brighter life is before you, and all I blame you for is because you imagine that without binding yourself you might follow in your mother's footsteps."

"That is where you are wrong, John," said Ruth, looking up at him with sorrowful eyes: "At my age my mother was no more a slave to drink than I am. She only took it in moderation, and if any one had suggested to her that she was in danger of becoming an habitual drinker, she would have been indignant. It was only because she found that a little stimulant revived her, when she was weak and ailing, that she began to take it frequently, till by and bye the habit became so strong, that though she tried hard to break it she could not, and why should I be stronger than my own mother?" [8]

"Well, darling, have it your own way. I shall not alter my opinion of you; but I won't argue the point. Now, dry your eyes, and be happy;" and being an obedient woman, Ruth dismissed her tears, and smiled up at John.

"Ruth," said John presently; "how is it that you are afraid for yourself, and yet not afraid for me?"

"Oh, John, I couldn't be; I trust you entirely, and though you know how much I would like you to become an abstainer too, not a thought of danger crosses my mind when you refuse."

"I should be sorry and hurt if you felt otherwise, my dear, and you may continue to trust me. I could never disgrace myself and bring more sorrow to you," and John took Ruth's hand, and held his head up proudly, and looked every inch of him a man worthy of a woman's trust and devotion.

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CHAPTER II.

JOHN'S BROTHER.

"RUTH, I'm going to spend the evening at home; my brother Dick's just returned from Australia, and mother's sent up for me to see him. You'll come with me, of course," said John, a few evenings after.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, I can't even ask to be spared. It's Jane's evening out, and we've got company, and there's hot supper ordered."

"What a nuisance! Ask Jane to give up for once; you're always obliging her."

"No, I can't do that, John, for cook is not best pleased, and Jane doesn't go the way to manage her."

"I'll go and give cook the length of my tongue, I declare," said John, angrily.

"Now you'll do nothing of the sort. You'll go and spend the evening with your brother, and give him my kind regards, and be sure and bring me back all the news." So saying, Ruth gave John a bright decided nod, and whisked back into the kitchen. [10]

"What do you think of that, cook? the unreasonableness of men!"

"What's up now?" asked cook, who was bending with a gloomy face over preparations for an elaborate supper.

"Why, John wanted me to go home with him to-night, and didn't see why I couldn't, though I told him how busy we should be."

"It's quite enough to have one of you gadding out and filling my hands with your work," growled cook.

"Yes, it's too bad, but we'll manage well enough without Jane; let me help you mix that, now," and Ruth took the basin, and with deft fingers, which cook secretly admired, beat the compound it contained till it was pronounced "just the thing."

Notwithstanding her brightness and ready surrender of an evening's pleasure, Ruth watched John go off with a keen feeling of disappointment, and for some minutes there was silence in the room.

"She's worth a dozen Janes," said cook to herself, for she was not so wholly engrossed with her own pursuits as to be quite unobservant of Ruth's disappointment.

"I don't know how it is," thought Ruth, as the busy evening wore away; "cook and I do get on well together; she's quite pleasant to-night, and wasn't cross, though I took the wrong sauce in just now."

Ah, Ruth, if there were more sunny tempers and unclouded faces like yours in the world, there would oftener come to clouded minds and gloomy moods just such brightness as you have brought to your fellow-servant to-night! [11]

John's brother Dick was several years older than John. Some ten years previously he had taken to a seafaring life, but soon tiring of it, he had settled in Australia. We say settled, but Dick Greenwood was one of those men who could never be truly said to settle to anything. He had tried farming, but the work was too hard; then he had joined a party going into the bush, their free and easy life having an attraction for him. After that, he went into a city store, and just as he had mastered the details of the business and might have succeeded in it, he was charmed by the performances of a band of travelling actors, and not being without natural ability in that direction, he had induced them to accept his services, and now, with little money, and a great deal of shady experience, he had worked his passage back to England, that he might just see how things were looking in the old country.

"Well, Jack, my boy, how are you?" he said in a loud, hoarse voice, as John entered the room, which was redolent of tobacco and brandy.

"All right, Dick; glad to see you, though I shouldn't have known you again. My word, you're a little different to the thin lath of a fellow you were when you left home." [12]

"You may say so," cried Dick; "I was a poor milksop then, and no mistake; but I've improved, and, you bet, I've learned a thing or two."

John was not quite so sure of the improvement. At least the stripling who had left his father's home was fresh and pure looking, but the man who had returned in his place was bloated and pimpled, and his once frank eyes now wandered furtively about.

"John's grown a fine fellow, hasn't he, Dick?" asked the mother, proudly.

"He ain't bad-looking, if that's what you mean, but he don't look up to snuff. No offence, Jack. I'll teach you a few wrinkles. Have a pipe, boy."

"Thanks," said John, replenishing his own.

"Take a glass," and Dick made a bumper of hot spirit and pushed it towards his brother.

"I don't take spirit, Dick. A glass of ale now and then is enough for me."

"Stuff and nonsense, Jack. Take it like a man. There's nothing like a glass of brandy and water for putting life into a fellow."

John took the glass, with a twinge of conscience as he thought of Ruth. But in the excitement of his brother's stirring accounts of bush life everything else was forgotten, and he not only drained the spirit before him, but finished a second glass with which Dick slyly supplied him.

"I tell you, Jack," said his brother, at the close of the evening, "life in England is a slow-going, humbugging sort of thing; hard work and little pay; you've got to bow and scrape to those who've got the brass, and they lord it over you as they don't dare to do anywhere else. Now, where I've come from, Jack's as good as his master, and in as fair a way of making his fortune too. Take my advice, boy, and come back with me. In a year or two you'll have made a home for that bonny lass I've been hearing of, and you can send for her. What do you say, eh?" [13]

For a minute John was too surprised to speak. "Really, Dick, you've taken me unawares. I'd like to get on faster than I have been doing, and make a better home for my little woman than I've any prospect of doing here; but for all that, what you propose is too serious a step to think of taking without a deal of thought, and I don't know what Ruth would say."

"If the girl's got any grit in her, she'll say, 'go, by all means, and send for me as quick as you can.' You can work your passage out, and I could get you into a store at Melbourne, and you're such a sticker, you'd be sure to get on. Now I never expect to be a rich man; I can't plod, and I must have change; but you're different, and would soon make your fortune."

John bade his parents and brother good-night, and walked home revolving the new idea. It was surrounded by a halo of romance that rendered it increasingly attractive to him. Success and happiness seemed to lay within his easy reach, and by the time that he arrived at his master's house he had quite decided to accompany his brother back to Australia, if Ruth would only consent to follow him. [14]

"And she's such a loving, sensible little thing; she wouldn't wish to stand in my way for a moment, especially when she knows it is for her own sake I want to go."

So thinking, John let himself in through the garden door, and was not surprised to find a dark figure, with white cap and apron, standing on the kitchen doorstep waiting for him.

"You are late, John; cook and Jane have gone to bed."

"Well, Ruthie, I'm glad of that, because if you're not too tired, I want a chat with you."

Too tired, indeed! When all the evening Ruth had been looking forward to that few minutes as her ample compensation for the disappointments and worries she had borne so patiently.

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CHAPTER III.

HOPES AND FEARS.

"HAVE you had a pleasant evening, John?" asked Ruth, after sitting for a minute or two in silence before the dying embers of the kitchen fire.

"Why, yes, dear, I believe so; but Dick put so many new ideas into my head that I didn't know how the time passed," replied John, wondering how he should speak of his new plans to Ruth.

"What sort of ideas, John?"

"He's been talking of Australia, and saying there's no place like it for getting on in the world, and, of course, he's likely to know; and, Ruthie, dear, he said if I would go back with him, he'd put me in the way of making money, and getting a home ready for you in no time."

Ruth took her hand out of John's, and stared fixedly into the fire. [16]

"Can't you say something, Ruth?" asked John, after waiting several minutes. Ruth breathed hard.

"What do you say, John? Do you want to go?"

"I don't want to leave you, darling, but if you'd promise to come out to me, I think it would be a good thing for both of us. I could get on so much better, and we could marry so much quicker than if I plodded on at the rate I'm going now."

"Then," said Ruth, looking up with a brave smile upon her white face, "you must go, John, and when you send for me I'll come out to you."

"Bless you, my dear, brave girl, you shall never repent your decision," cried John. "I'll work harder than ever, and we'll soon be together again, never to say good-bye."

But at that dread word, Ruth's composure gave way, and she hid her face.

"Don't take on so, Ruthie. It will only be a short separation, and we're bound to each other for life," said John, trying to soothe her.

"I've no fear in letting you go from me, John," answered Ruth, proudly, through her tears; "and after you're once gone, I shall look forward to seeing you again." And the lump in Ruth's throat was choked back, and she sat up with an air that was plainly intended to carry a warning to any rebellious tears that might threaten.

"And now, John, tell me about your brother. Is he like you?" [17]

John laughed.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't think so, Ruthie, and I can't say Australia has much improved him. However, you must judge for yourself, for I shall take you to see him soon. He sent kind messages to you, and is anxious to make your acquaintance."

But Dick was soon dismissed from the conversation, for Ruth and John had much to talk over that was of far more interest even than a brother newly arrived from the other side of the world. Before they parted that night, John had succeeded in imparting to Ruth a little of his own enthusiasm in view of the new life he was about to enter upon, though her last thought before closing her weary eyes in sleep was: "Women feel so differently from men, and I must try and not discourage John by any of my fears, poor boy!"

A few days later she accompanied John to his home.

"Dick's out, my dear, but he'll be in directly, as he knew you were coming," said Mrs. Greenwood, affectionately greeting Ruth.

"He don't care to spend much of his time with his old father and mother, Dick don't," complained Mr. Greenwood.

"We can hardly expect he'd settle down to our quiet ways, father, such a boy for company as he is. John's different now, and he'll be sure to make a comfortable stay-at-home husband; but then he hasn't the go in him that my Dick has." [18]

"He's quite sufficient, anyhow," said Ruth quickly, with an instinctive feeling of dislike towards the brother who she felt must be so different to John. Truly, as the door opened just then, and Dick's ungainly figure appeared, the contrast between the brothers was striking. Ruth's inward comment was not complimentary, but she struggled with herself, and when John said by way of introduction, "Dick, I've brought Ruthie to see you," she stretched out her hand with no hesitation of manner.

"Glad to see you, my lass. Jack's a more knowing dog than I thought for, I declare," he exclaimed, looking at Ruth's sweet, upturned face with such coarse approbation, that the girl's eyes fell under his scrutiny.

"Guess I may claim a brother's right a little beforehand," continued Dick, trying to draw Ruth to him.

Ruth's eyes flashed, and she started back indignantly, saying: "Indeed, you shall do no such thing, Mr. Richard."

"Come, come, Dick, Ruth isn't the girl to allow any liberty," interposed John, putting Ruth into a chair.

"Prudish, eh? Ah, well, colonial life will soon knock that rubbish out of her," returned Dick, in an unpleasant tone.

"So you're really bent on going as well, John?" asked his mother, anxiously. [19]

"Well, yes, mother; Ruth says she'll come after me, and I quite agree with Dick in thinking I ought to be doing better for myself."

"It's hard to bring up children, and then see them go off to foreign parts so easily," murmured the poor mother.

"Why, mother, you've got Susan, and Tom, and Bess all settled near, and I'll come over and pay you a visit when I've made my fortune; and you may be sure I'll never forget the dear old folks at home;" and John laid his hand affectionately upon his mother's shoulder.

"I say, can't you stop your sentimental rubbish, and get to business?" cried Dick.

The mother sighed, and knowing well what Dick would consider a necessary prelude and accompaniment to business arrangements, brought out a bottle of spirits, some hot water, and glasses.

"Come, my dear, I'll just mix you a glass, and we'll make up our quarrel and be friends," said Dick graciously to Ruth.

"Pray don't trouble, for I never take anything of the kind," replied Ruth, very stiffly.

"Mean to say that you belong to the teetotal set!"

"I do."

"Well, I'm glad Jack's got better sense than to follow your example," answered Dick; and from that time he treated Ruth with open disdain.

For John's sake she controlled herself, and sat beside him listening, with an aching heart, to the account of colonial life as Dick had known it; watching also, with a vague uneasiness and dread, John's frequent applications to the spirit with which his brother supplied him. If, in her presence, he so readily yielded to Dick's persuasion to take "just a drop more," what might be the consequence when he was far away from her, and completely under his brother's influence? [20]

In one hour all Ruth's bright hopes for the future, and John's well-doing in a distant land, faded; and when she passed out of the reeking atmosphere of the little room into the cool, tranquil moonlight, her heart seemed to have died within her.

[21]

CHAPTER IV.

QUITE UNLIKE HIMSELF.

"NOW quiet we are, to be sure!" exclaimed John, when he began to observe that Ruth was paying no attention to his noisy talk. "I suppose you're offended with Dick. That's very silly, for he means no harm, and has just been used to say what he likes. He's a good-hearted fellow at bottom."

"I don't mind for myself, John; but, oh, I'm sure he won't do you any good. I wish you would go out by yourself, and not depend upon his promises, for I feel he isn't to be trusted."

"Rubbish, Ruth; who should I trust if not my own brother? and besides, I've got my eyes open, and am able to look out for myself."

"But, John, do forgive me for saying it, you didn't look out for yourself even this evening, for you let Dick give you more brandy than you have ever been in the habit of taking, and it has made you quite unlike yourself, and I cannot help being afraid of what may happen if you go away with him." [22]

"I suppose you mean to say I'm drunk," angrily cried John.

"No, John, I can't say that; but it wouldn't take much more brandy to make you so."

"Then you'd best go home by yourself, for I'm no fit company for you," and John roughly threw Ruth's hand off his arm, and turned back with unsteady footsteps towards the town. The girl stood dismayed. John was indeed quite unlike himself, to leave her in a lonely road to find her way home unattended. She waited for some time, hoping that he would relent, but the last sound of his footsteps died away, and presently she slowly walked on.

"Why, where's John?" asked cook, as Ruth entered the kitchen.

"Oh, he'll be in directly, I expect. He's just turned back for something. You go off to bed, and I'll see to the fire," carelessly returned Ruth.

"Something wrong, I believe," said cook to herself, as she lit her candle, and followed Jane upstairs.

For an hour Ruth waited, and then, unable to bear the suspense, she threw a shawl over her head, and slipped down to the garden gate to watch for John. At length, shivering with cold, she was about to return to the house, when she heard in the distance the noisy snatch of a song. "It can't be John, of course; but I'll just hide behind the laurels till the drunken fellow has passed," [23] thought Ruth. Nearer and nearer came the sound, till, with beating heart, Ruth stepped into the moonlight, and laid her hand on the lips that were profaning the stillness of the midnight air.

"Oh, John; hush, hush! If master should hear you! Oh, what have you been doing, my poor boy?" John made but a feeble resistance to the strong loving hands that drew him into the house.

"Well, I've had a spree, and why mayn't I, with my own brother?" he said, with an inane smile on his face, as he sank into a chair. Ruth made no answer, but wrung a towel out of cold water, and bound it around John's throbbing temples. Then she put the remains of some strong coffee, which had been sent down from the drawing-room, over the fire.

"Drink it," she said, offering it to him when it was sufficiently heated.

"It's horrid," said John, shuddering as he tasted the unmilked, sugarless liquid.

"It will do you good; drink it at once." John obeyed, and Ruth stood watching the effect of ministrations such as she had so often rendered in the past to her drinking mother. In a few minutes John rose to his feet with a sigh.

"I've been a fool to-night, Ruth; but I'll go off to bed, and by morning I'll be in my right senses," he said.

She lit his candle, and carried it for him to the foot of the attic stairs, then went to her own room, and till morning light dawned, resolved endless schemes for preventing the carrying out of [24] John's plans to go abroad with the brother whose influence had already been so powerful for evil. Finally, she determined to speak plainly to John, and tell him she could never consent to follow him if he had anything to do with Dick, unless he promised to sign the pledge before going away. Then she fell into a troubled sleep, until it was time to commence another day's duties.

"I'm desperately ashamed of myself," said John, when alone with Ruth the next day; "can you

find it in your heart to forgive me for costing you so much pain?"

"Don't talk of forgiveness, John; I shall think nothing of all I have suffered, if it will only teach you to be careful and avoid drinking with Dick in the future."

"I promise you he shall never make me forget myself again; and if you will only trust me, dear, I'll try and hold my head up once more."

"I do trust you, John; but I want you to do what I have done, and promise faithfully not to touch drink again. If you take only a little, it may lead to more, as it did last night; but if you can say 'I never touch it,' you put yourself out of the way of being tempted. Do listen to me now, and be persuaded."

"Really, Ruth, that is too much to expect. It isn't manly to be bound by a pledge, and it makes a fellow look as if he hadn't any pluck or self-confidence to be afraid of a glass. Why, I believe Dick would have nothing to do with me if I took your advice." [25]

"So much the better, then," was the decided answer; "Dick will be your ruin if you depend on him. Do give him up and go out by yourself. Master would give you testimonials to his friends in Melbourne, and you could be quite independent of your brother."

"I'm not going to depend on Dick; I've got myself to look to. All I want from Dick is a start, and I'll take care he doesn't lead me into harm's way. If not for my own sake, for yours, Ruthie, dear, I will be careful."

It was hard for Ruth to utter her determination after John's tender words; but the bitter past had been too vividly before her all the morning to allow her to falter in her purpose for more than a passing moment.

"John," she said, "I've quite made up my mind that I cannot follow you to Australia unless you take the pledge first, or at least promise that you will not take intoxicants; for, unless you do so, I know that with the many temptations you will meet, especially if you persist in going with Dick, that all hope of a happy home will be at an end, and I will never risk passing through what I once did."

"What on earth are you saying, Ruth? Why, you've promised and can't break your word. I'm going for your sake, and here you say you won't come out to me," cried John, scarce believing his ears. [26]

"No, John, I can't, unless you promise what I wish. When I passed my word to you I didn't know what I know now, and I'm quite justified in recalling my promise."

"You're a cruel, hard-hearted girl, and I don't believe you care a straw for me, or you wouldn't make a hindrance out of such a paltry thing. I only made a slip yesterday evening, and I vow it shall be for the last time."

Deeply pained, Ruth only shook her head.

"So you won't believe me! Well, I'll promise no such thing as you ask. I won't be tied to any woman's apron strings," and in extreme irritation, John flung himself out of the kitchen.

"This is too hard!" exclaimed Ruth despairingly. Poor girl! the only earthly brightness that had ever come to her was soon quenched in gloom, and she knew nothing of the comfort and peace which faith in the protection and love of a Heavenly Father can afford in the darkest hour. No wonder that courage and hope nearly died out of her stricken heart. The days went by, and John made no attempt to bridge the chasm between himself and Ruth. She knew he was making preparations for speedily leaving England. She also knew that whenever he returned from visiting his father's home, he was more or less the worse for drink. As usual, she stayed up for him, and kept her knowledge of his condition from her fellow-servants, though she could not hide from them that the relationship between them had changed. [27]

"You're not treating that girl well, I believe," said cook sharply to John one day; "you'll never meet her equal again, though you may cross the seas."

"Mind your own business," angrily retorted John, following Ruth into the garden.

"Have you anything to say to me, Ruth? I'm going home to-morrow, and I expect to sail next week," he said. If his tone had been less hard, Ruth might have ventured to plead again with him, but she simply said:

"No, John, I have said all that I mean to, except that I wish you all success and happiness."

"Same to you, Ruth," dryly responded John, and turned on his heel.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE OF OPINIONS AND OF HOUSEMAIDS.

"I CAN'T think what's come to Ruth," said Mr. Groombridge one day, at dinner-time, about six months after John Greenwood had sailed for Australia; "she's lost all her brightness, and goes about the house as white and silent as a ghost."

"She is greatly changed, poor girl, and though I cannot get her to confess it, cook tells me there was some misunderstanding between her and John, and that she has not heard from him since he sailed," replied his wife.

"She told me the other day he had arrived safely and was doing well in a store," said Harry.

"She would hear all that from his parents; but, my dear, you had better try and win the girl's confidence, and see if you can do anything. It's a thousand pities for a young thing to mope and pine away her best years, when a little advice may set matters right, and make two people happy." [29]

"I'll do what I can, but I'm afraid it will not be of much use," said Mrs. Groombridge.

"Ruth," she said, when retiring that evening, "I want you to do one or two little things in my room."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Ruth, and followed her mistress upstairs. As she was flitting about the bedroom Mrs. Groombridge suddenly asked:

"By the bye, Ruth, when did you last hear from John?" Ruth turned away to hide the painful flushing of her face.

"I—I—what did you say, ma'am?"

"When did John last write to you?"

A silence ensued, and then Ruth said: "He's written to his parents, ma'am, and not to me."

"Why, how is that, Ruth? Surely you expected to hear from him."

"Not much, ma'am," Ruth forced herself to say.

"But, Ruth, if you are going out to marry him, he ought to write to you, and you ought to expect him to do so." Ruth's apparent apathy gave way as the remembrance of all her happy dreaming swept over her at her mistress's words. She buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly. Mrs. Groombridge laid a kindly hand upon her shoulder. "Sit down, my poor child, and tell me all about your trouble. Something is wrong between you and John, and perhaps I can help to make it right."

"Oh, no, no, ma'am, it's past any one's help," sobbed Ruth, and by degrees her sorrowful story [30] was told. "And, ma'am, I know that his brother will be the ruin of John; he'll go downhill fast, as many a fine young fellow has done."

Mrs. Groombridge looked grave. She was no abstainer, as we know; but she could not help seeing the danger that menaced John, if he could be so easily persuaded to overstep the limits of prudence and sobriety.

"Yes, Ruth, I think there is cause for anxiety about John, but you must not lose heart. I think you acted unwisely in letting him go as you did; at least you might have gone out to him if you knew he was keeping sober and doing well, and the very anticipation of your coming might have given him a motive and impetus that nothing else could. Men dislike to be forced into anything, and have a great objection to be bound by a pledge. You should have been more careful in urging that."

"But, ma'am, John was one of those who needed to promise, for he's good-tempered and obliging, and doesn't know how to refuse a friend."

"Still, I think you were too hasty in cutting away the hope he had of your going out to him. What has he to look forward to?"

"Perhaps you are right, ma'am. I might have waited; but I was frightened to think of what might lie before me. I know the misery of a home cursed by drink." [31]

"Ruth, will you write and say as much to John? Tell him you'll come out to him as soon as he

has a home ready for you, and he can assure you that he is leading a sober life."

A hard, almost defiant look passed into Ruth's eyes for a moment. She thought how cruelly John had left her, without a word of tenderness, and she said coldly: "Oh, no, ma'am, I couldn't do that; if John would write and ask me, I might; but I will never humble myself to him, for he has been wrong and unkind all through, and I dare say he's glad to be free." She had said the same to herself many a time since the morning when John had said good-bye to her with as much composure as if he were going to return in a few hours, and she had almost grown to believe they must be true. Nevertheless, her heart leaped to hear her mistress say:

"You should not try to think that, Ruth, for I believe you wrong John by doing so; he is true and manly, and probably he would be only too happy to receive a letter from you."

"Well, ma'am, I don't feel as if I could write first," was the obstinate reply; and Ruth presently left the room with a still heavier heart than she had entered it.

"It's a sad case, George, and my conscience is not at rest about the part we have played in it," was Mrs. Groombridge's remark to her husband, after retailing her conversation with Ruth. [32]

"How are we to blame, my dear?" was the surprised question.

"I can't help remembering how we laughed at Ruth for her fanatical whims as we called them, and encouraged John to do the same. Events have proved she was right. Perhaps if we had taken another stand, John might have followed Ruth's example, and all this unhappiness been spared to both."

"Perhaps," was the curt response.

"Harry, my boy," said his father the following morning, "how many cases did I hear you say you had at the hospital the other day which were the result of drink?"

"About three-fourths, father; of course, not all caused by the drinking habits of the patients themselves: but when a child is brought in badly burned because its mother was off on a drinking spree, or when a man has been run over because a driver is the worse for drink, or even when a woman is dying of disease, the result of want and neglect which drink has brought about, I suppose it's quite fair to credit the drink as the indirect cause of such cases."

"Oh, decidedly! Good gracious! I wish the Government would let all other questions go to the wall, Ireland included, while they did something to mend matters!"

"My dear, how would you like Government to step in and stop your supplies?" [33]

"I'd be content they should do that, if it were for the public good," warmly replied Mr. Groombridge.

"I have heard of private individuals not waiting for the interference of Government; but who, believing it to be for the public good, have themselves banished all intoxicants from their homes," said Mrs. Groombridge, in a meaning tone.

Mr. Groombridge looked thoughtfully at his wife across the table, but said nothing, and the subject dropped.

That evening Jane the housemaid bounced into the kitchen, and flung herself into the nearest chair.

"What's the matter now?" asked cook, glancing at her disturbed face.

"A very good matter indeed! I'm going to make a change. I've had enough scolding and faultfinding, as I told mistress a minute ago."

"I suppose she's given you a month's notice, and you deserve it richly for your saucy tongue."

"You're a fine one to talk, for I couldn't hold a candle to you! Yes, she told me I had better look out for another place, and I told her it was just what I had thought of doing."

"Well, I hope you'll be taught a lesson, for I tell you there aren't many mistresses as kind and considerate as Mrs. Groombridge, and you'll find it out to your cost, I'm afraid," said Ruth.

"You've got no cause to complain, for every one of them pets you up to the skies," replied Jane. [34]

"Ruth's earned all she gets, and so have you, Jane, for the matter of that. She's obliging and respectful, and you're disagreeable and pert half your time," said cook.

"I ought to be flattered, I'm sure," retorted Jane, tossing her head as she sat down to continue her work of trimming a hat with some particularly smart ribbons and flowers. The month passed and Jane left, a new housemaid coming in the same day.

"A different sort to Jane, I can see," whispered cook to Ruth, as the new-comer went upstairs to take her bonnet off. It was a pretty, modest face that presently showed itself in the kitchen; but there were traces of sadness about the eyes and mouth, and the new housemaid's dress was trimmed with crape.

"Poor thing! perhaps she's lost her mother," thought Ruth, and cook's usually sharp voice softened as she asked the girl her name.

"Alice Martin," was the timid reply.

[35]

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW HOUSEMAID.

"WOULD you believe it, Ruth, that girl's a regular Methodist; read her Bible, and said her prayers like any parson last night and again this morning. If she don't work as well as pray, I'll be down on her, sharp."

Ruth looked up with a wondering glance at Alice, who entered the kitchen at that moment with brushes and brooms. A Bible-reading, praying housemaid was a curiosity she had never witnessed. But Alice looked bright and business-like enough to allay any fears respecting her capability to perform her allotted tasks, and after a pleasant "good morning," she proceeded to go about her work in a manner that showed she knew all about it. After a few weeks had passed, both cook and Ruth agreed that the new girl was quite a treasure, with the reservation from cook, who saw no connection between Alice's religion and her daily life—"if it wasn't for her precious chapel-going and religious humbug." [36]

"Come with me for a walk, Alice, instead of going to your class; it's a shame to stay indoors such an afternoon," said Ruth, one Sunday.

"Oh, I couldn't miss my class for anything; but do you come with me, and we can have a little walk after."

Ruth hesitated. She knew that cook would laugh at her for going, but she was feeling low and depressed, and the thought of a solitary walk was irksome to her.

"Well, I don't mind, just for once. It's miserable to walk by one's self," she said.

So she went to the Bible-class which Alice so regularly attended. The lesson was interesting and impressive, and as, from the lips of the minister's wife who gave it, there fell words of invitation to the sin-burdened and weary, Ruth felt strangely moved. Unconsciously her tears fell, for her heart ached with loneliness and longing as she heard of the Saviour and Friend, who was willing to come into her life and crown it with His forgiving love and mercy. She walked on in silence by the side of her companion.

"How did you like Mrs. Evans?" Alice presently asked.

"She made me feel wretched; I don't want to go again."

"That was just how I felt when I first heard her talk; but do go again, for she will do you so much good." [37]

"You never had such reason as I have to be wretched and miserable," exclaimed Ruth.

"Oh, you don't know; I've had more trouble than I've known how to bear; and then there was the burden of my sins that made me more unhappy than I can tell you," added Alice, timidly.

"I don't know anything about that; but I do know that my life is a burden. I had a wretched home, and when I went to service, and something that seemed too good to be true came, it was just taken from me, and now, I'd like to die and be out of my misery."

"Do tell me what your trouble is, dear, then I will try to help you," affectionately pleaded Alice.

Ruth needed no persuasion. The sweet consistency of Alice's life, her invariable good temper and readiness to help, and a certain wistful look in her eyes when Ruth was more than usually depressed, had won her confidence and affection, and the story of her life was readily poured into the ear of her sympathising fellow-servant.

"And now," concluded Ruth, "if you think there's any hope or help for me, I shall be surprised."

"Ruth, I know what it is to have a home like you have had, and I know what it is to lose one more dear than any, and I can not only sympathise, but I can assure you there is both hope and help for you," replied Alice, with full eyes. [38]

"Poor girl! then you have suffered, too!"

"Yes, my father drank himself to death, and my mother died of a broken heart soon after, and then I went to service. I was engaged to a young man I had known a long while, and we were to have been married this spring, but he died quite suddenly, and I thought my heart would break; but Mrs. Evans came to see me, and helped me so much. She told me of the One who can heal every wound, and now, if I feel lonely and sad sometimes, I know I have a friend in Jesus, and I just go to Him and tell Him about my heart-ache, and He comforts me."

"Would He give me back my John, if I asked Him, do you think, Alice?" suddenly asked Ruth.

"Perhaps He would, but He will certainly help you to bear your sorrow if you go to Him."

"I'm afraid to go to Him, Alice. I'm only a servant, and I've done a great many wrong things, and He might be angry."

"No, dear, for He says: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,' and He means it. Take your sins to Him first, and ask His forgiveness, and then tell Him all about your trouble. Shall we hurry home and pray together?"

"Oh, yes, for it's all new to me, and I would like you to show me how to pray."

The two girls hurried home, and knelt together, while in simple, heartfelt words, Alice laid the need of her companion at the feet of Him who hears and answers prayer. [39]

"That has done me good; thank you so much, Alice," whispered Ruth, with a grateful kiss.

"You will pray by yourself, won't you, dear?" asked Alice.

"Yes, and for John too," answered Ruth, a bright hope already dawning in her heart.

That evening, at Alice's suggestion, she looked through the Bible for promises to meet her special need. When she went downstairs to lay supper, it was with a glad heart at the abundant encouragement she had received. From that time she commenced a new life, and though her feet often faltered in the upward path, and her heart sometimes grew heavy with foreboding fears, a light had arisen for her which grew brighter as the months passed. Many times she sorely regretted that she had let John go from her in pride and anger. If she had but the opportunity now—and her heart ached for it—how tenderly she would plead with him to be true to himself and her.

"John says he supposes you've forgotten all about him," said Mrs. Greenwood one evening, when she had called.

Ruth's face grew scarlet.

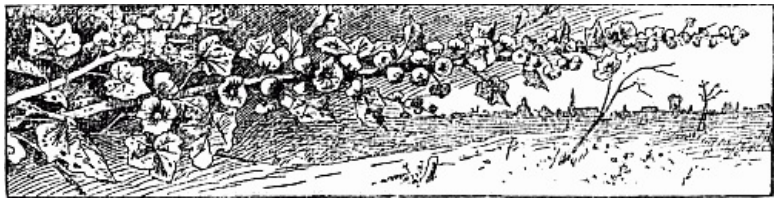
"Why doesn't he write to me, then, and let me know what he means?" she cried with bitterness. [40]

"I'm sorry you should have quarrelled, my dear, for I believe you're the very woman for him; and I know he's desperately fond of you, and here's Dick saying Jack would do better with a woman to keep him out of mischief."

"What's his address?" asked Ruth. It was written down for her, and she soon made an excuse to leave. There were many conflicting thoughts and emotions at work in her mind and heart. How could John suppose she could ever forget him? Had he said anything to his mother about his being desperately fond of her, or was it only Mrs. Greenwood's surmisings? And what did Dick mean by saying that John would do better with a woman to keep him out of mischief? Was he going downhill so rapidly that his degraded elder brother had lost control over him? Might John himself be longing for an assurance that he was forgiven, and if the assurance were given, would it be a help and stay to him? Oh, if she dare think so! Well, she would risk it, and write that very night, and as she made the decision a great burden fell from her, and she knew her decision was right.

Far on into the night Ruth sat writing sheet after sheet by the light of her candle. She wrote of the new joy that had come to her since John left, and told him it had only increased her love and yearning for him; how night and day she prayed that he might be kept from harm and evil, and that some day they might yet meet and be happy. She concluded by asking him to forgive her, if she had seemed hard and unkind, and reminded him again of her own painful past, and how she felt it was wrong to face a future that might hold a like experience for her; but if he could only assure her that he was living a sober, respectable life, and intended doing so, she would come out to him just as soon as he had a home ready. Then with many tears and prayers Ruth directed her letter and went to bed. [41]

Ah, poor Ruth! could she have foretold the fate of her letter, how would the bright hopes she was entertaining have been quenched in darkness!



[42]

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATE OF RUTH'S LETTER.

DICK GREENWOOD was slowly sauntering up one of the chief streets of the city of Melbourne. Turning down a side street, he entered into a store, and asked if any letters had been left there for him or his brother.

"Why, yes, I believe there's a packet knocking about. Jones, reach 'em off that shelf," answered the foreman.

A letter from his mother, and another in a strange handwriting to John, was passed across to Dick, who took them and left the store.

"That plaguey boy may fetch his own letters. Blowed if I'll waste my time calling round; but who's been writing to him now, I wonder? Some woman's hand. That means mischief, for sure!"

Dick turned the envelope over, and studied the calligraphy with an air of uncertainty. Suddenly he exclaimed, half aloud:

"It's from that soft fool of a girl, I'll bet anything. She's found out which way her bread was buttered, and means to come the doubles over Jack; but not quite so easy done, my girl. The boy's [43] got a brother who'll look after him, so here goes;" and Dick tore open the envelope, glanced at the signature, nodded his head in triumph, and deliberately read the closely-written pages.

"The lying humbug! So that's the way she'd throw dust into Jack's eyes, and he'd be as innocent as a new-born babe, and write back begging her forgiveness, and telling her he'd be ready for her in a trice! Bah, how I hate such tomfoolery!" and Dick tore the letter, which had been written with so many tears and prayers, into a hundred fragments, and sent them flying down the street.

Some days later found him back in a bush settlement, where he had, a few months before, persuaded John to join him. Despite the latter's attempt at bravado, he had left England with a very sore heart, and a resolve to show Ruth that he could keep steady, and make his way in the new land. He quite intended to save money towards preparing a home; and thought that, in a year or two, he would write to Ruth, and ask her to overlook the past, and come out to him, for he never doubted her love and fidelity. But, though he had soon found a situation where he might have risen and achieved his purpose, he had no sooner commenced to save than his brother Dick would appear, and lead him into scenes of revelry and dissipation, where his money would be more than wasted. After one of these times John said, with bitterness:

[44]

"Pity I didn't bring my Ruth out! She'd have kept me straight instead of helping me down as you do."

In a letter that Dick had subsequently written home, he had sneeringly said that Jack wanted a woman to look after him. What effect that remark had upon Ruth we have previously seen.

Finally, Dick had persuaded John to leave his situation, and join him and his lawless companions in their wild bush life; yet, even there, his thoughts often reverted to Ruth, and he made up his mind that if she would only break the silence and tell him she cared as much as ever for him, he would leave his present surroundings and begin a new life. Often, when engaged in pursuits new and exciting, or carousing with companions as degraded as his own brother, the sweet, happy restraints of the old home life, and the pure face of the woman he loved would rise before him in vivid contrast, and with an unutterable loathing he would turn from his present life, and long to be free. Yet he lacked moral courage to break from his brother's influence; and, as John, in many ways, proved serviceable to Dick, the latter, by flattery or by threats, was continually strengthening his hold upon John's weaker nature. So Dick was rejoiced that Ruth's letter had fallen into his hands, well knowing that John could never have withstood the

temptation it would have presented to him.

"Any letters from home, Dick?" inquired John of his brother, who sat before a rough, uncovered [45] table, making heavy inroads upon the provisions with which it was loaded.

"There's one in my coat," answered Dick, nodding in the direction of his top-coat, which he had flung aside on entering. John got up and felt in the pocket, and drew out his mother's letter.

"No other, Dick?"

"No; ain't that enough for you?" was the answer.

John took the letter and went out of the room.

"She is too hard on a fellow, she is; but, oh, Ruthie, if I had you here, I'd be out of this soon enough!" he said to himself.

Yet, all through the hours of the following night, John laughed as loudly and drank as deeply as any of the rough men who had been invited to meet Dick, and listen to the news after his short absence from the settlement. In the early dawn, the company broke up, and left the log building, making, as they went to their several homes, the still, fragrant air resonant with snatches of ribald song and coarse jest.

Dick threw himself upon a settle and was soon sleeping heavily; but John staggered out of the noisome atmosphere, and leaned against the framework of the door. The cool morning breeze fanned his heated brow, and the twitter of the birds fell on his dulled ears. The stars had paled, but the moon shone clear in the blue sky, now fast taking on the gorgeous hues of the dawn. He stood, unconscious of the beauty of scene and sound around him, till the echoes of his late [46] companions' unhallowed mirth had died away. Then there came to him, as there always did at such times, the thought of Ruth. What would she say to see him now? Yet, deeply though he had fallen, John would have given worlds, if he had possessed them, to have stood in her presence at that moment with drooping head, and confessed all his weakness and misery, and begged her to forgive him, and help him to retrieve the bitter past.

"Oh, Ruth, you took the pledge for my sake, and now, if you were only here, I'd take it for my own sake and yours too," groaned John.

It was only the fancy of a heated imagination, of course, but just then, as the first ray of the rising sun glanced through the forest clearing, and fell at his feet, he felt himself looking down into Ruth's upturned, pleading eyes; her hand lay on his arm, and her voice said: "For my sake, John, take it now!" He started, as if from a dream, and looked round. No apparition melted into morning mist, no human form was yet stirring, but, with a strange, mingled sense of awe and gladness, John said:

"Bless you, my Ruthie, I will, for your sake! You shall never have cause to be ashamed of me again!"

Then he turned indoors, and, throwing himself down beside his brother, was soon fast asleep.

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[47]

CHAPTER VIII.

A HAPPY ENDING.

"YOU skulking good-for-nothing greenhorn! go and beg on the streets if you will, for I'll never raise my hand to save you from starvation," roared Dick Greenwood, when a few hours later John told him he intended returning to Melbourne.

"I quite believe that, Dick, for you've done your best to bring me to it," replied John.

But Dick poured out such a volley of oaths, that John wisely forbore to say anything further.

Finding he could not provoke John to retaliate, Dick sneered: "I suppose now you've sown your wild oats, and got all you could out of me, you'll be sending for that smooth-tongued, virtuous wench to come out and help you keep straight, for such a poor weak fool as you'll never do without some one to look after you; but see if I don't let her know a few of your nice little secrets." [48]

John's blood was raised to boiling-point. He started to his feet, and the next minute Dick lay

prostrate before him.

"Take that," he cried; "and if you dare to say one more word about her, I'll give you cause to repent it. You're not worthy to lick the ground she treads on."

Dick looked up, but neither moved nor spoke, while his younger brother thrust a few odds and ends into a bag, and prepared to leave. Coward as he was, he feared to provoke John's just anger again, and not till after the door was violently slammed behind his brother, and the sound of his rapid footsteps had died away, did Dick rise from the ground.

Then he shook himself to ascertain if he had received any damages, and finding himself not much the worse for his fall, he sat down and took out his pipe. For some time he smoked furiously, and then struck his hands together as he exclaimed:

"I'll do it, as sure as I live! I'll pay him out for this, or my name's not Dick Greenwood."

Three days after, John walked into the store in Melbourne, where he had been previously employed.

"It's you, is it?" said the foreman; "ain't you satisfied with your change?"

"No," said John, with emphasis; "I'd rather sweep a crossing. I suppose you've filled my place."

The foreman nodded, and jerked his thumb in the direction of a young man who was leisurely serving a customer. [49]

"Do you really want work, man, or is it only 'come and go' again?" asked he, seeing that John looked disappointed.

"Mr. Smith, I'd give anything for a chance to work. I'm sick of knocking about."

"Well, look here! he ain't up to much good," and the shopman was again indicated; "got no 'go' in him, and you always suited me. You may come and show him how to do business in my line, but you'll have to start with lower wages, eh?"

John thankfully accepted the offer. "Now for Ruth and a home of my own!" he said the next morning, when beginning his work.

It was scarcely a wise decision he had made, not to write to her until he was ready to send for her; but a certain feeling of pride held him back, for he said: "She doubted me once, and now I'll wait till I can prove myself worthy of her trust."

Meanwhile, in heart-sickening suspense, Ruth waited mail after mail for an answer to her letter. At last there came one for her, bearing the Australian postmark. She tore it open in fear, for the handwriting was strange. It ran as follows:

"Dear Miss,

"I am sorry to send you bad news, but you must take it kindly from one who wishes you well. The truth is, that Jack is going to the bad as fast as he can, which I'm sorry to say of my own brother. I was downright ashamed of the way he went on, after reading a letter you sent him. He got real mad over it, and swore he'd [50] have nothing to do with a canting Methodist, and a deal more which I won't write, not wishing to put you about. Last of all, he tore the letter up. I write these few lines to save you from expecting to hear any more of him, as he's off on his own hook, and I wash my hands of the scamp.

"Hoping you are in health, I remain,

"Your obedient servant,
"R. Greenwood."

Ruth sat stunned. The bell rang, but she heeded not. Alice came up, but she took no notice of her anxious inquiries. Hearing of her condition, Harry Groombridge left the dinner-table and went to her.

"She's had some shock; this letter doubtless! May I read it, Ruth?" he asked.

The girl mutely assented.

The young man glanced through the contents, and handed it to his mother, who had followed him. She read it, and they exchanged looks. Then Mrs. Groombridge took one of Ruth's cold hands in hers, and said:

"Ruth, my dear girl, this letter is a hoax, I am persuaded, for you know John's brother is an unprincipled man. I think he has quarrelled with John, and then revenged himself by writing to you in this cruel way. I can't think John has gone so far wrong as to talk of you before his brother in such a manner. My impression is, that he was glad to get your letter, and left his brother, resolving to prove himself worthy of you yet." [51]

"That's about it," remarked Harry.

Ruth gasped with a sense of relief.

"Oh, if I could but think so; but then, why doesn't he write himself?" she said.

"I can't say, but trust him a little longer, Ruth. When did his parents last hear from him?"

"I don't know, ma'am. Lately I've felt I couldn't go there."

"You shall run down to-night; or stay, you are not fit to go. Harry, will you go at once to Mrs. Greenwood, and ask her to bring John's last letters?"

"With pleasure, mother." He soon returned with Mrs. Greenwood.

"You've had a letter from Dick, my dear, that's upset you, so the young gentleman says. I hope he's all right, for it's long since we had a line, though we hear every other mail from John," she said.

"Do tell me where he is, and what he is doing, for Dick says he is going to the bad fast, and I can't believe it," said Ruth.

"That I'm sure he isn't," cried the mother; "he left the store to go with Dick, but he's gone back now, for he says it was a wild life that didn't suit him, and he got into a bad set; but he's doing well now, and living quiet and respectable, and tells us he has signed the pledge, and—and—but oh, my dear, I wasn't to tell you this; for he meant to write himself and tell you all about it, but you were so anxious, what could I do?" [52]

Ruth's eyes filled with happy tears. How abundantly her prayers were being answered she only found when she came to read John's letters!

"I must wait patiently till he writes to me; but why doesn't he reply to my letter?"

"Depend upon it, Ruth, he never had it, or he would at least have mentioned it when writing home. It must have fallen into his brother's hands," replied Mrs. Groombridge.

"I don't believe Dick is as bad as that," said the mother, when Ruth's mistress had left the room.

"My dear," said Mr. Groombridge, after hearing the story; "I shall persuade Ruth to go out at once. Our friends, the Grahams, who find it so difficult to secure good servants in Melbourne, will be only too glad of Ruth's help until John can make her a home, and she will be a strength and stay to him, and all suspense for her will be over."

"I don't like to part with Ruth a day before I'm obliged, but I think your plan excellent," returned his wife.

It was discovered that, when consulted, Ruth's opinion coincided exactly with that of her mistress, and a month afterwards she bade farewell to her friends and sailed for Australia.

"You've a young man named Greenwood in your employ, I believe?" said a gentleman, walking into the store where John was engaged. [53]

"Yes, I have, sir."

"Can you spare him an hour or two? I want him to meet a friend who is coming in by the steamer to-day from England."

"Certainly, sir. Here, John, this gentleman wants you to go down with him to the Docks."

John looked surprised, but, supposing it to be a business call, put on his coat and hat and walked out.

"Are you expecting a friend from England?" asked the stranger.

"No, sir, I wish I was," was John's involuntary reply.

"I had a letter from my old friend Mr. Groombridge, of Bristol, and he asked me to call for you on my way to the Docks, as some one you once knew was coming in by the steamer."

"Who did he say it was, sir?" asked John, with a sudden tumultuous beating of the heart.

"He did mention the name, I believe; but, dear me, I've left the letter at home. It's no matter, though, you will soon learn," said Mr. Graham, with an amused smile, as he watched John's face.

"It couldn't be, of course," argued John to himself; but as the steamer came in he eagerly scanned the faces of the passengers, with but one thought.

No, she was not there, and with a bitter feeling of disappointment he fell back.

"John! Oh, John!" [54]

He looked up. How could he have overlooked that figure with eager hands stretched out towards him! Yes, it was his trusting, loving Ruth, who, unasked, had crossed the seas to help and cheer him in the hard battle he was fighting for her sake.

"Oh, Ruthie," he said, as he grasped her hands; "I don't deserve this. Why have you come, darling?"

"Why, I came for your sake, of course, John; but are you quite sure you want me?"

"You may well ask that, for I've been a brute to you; and now I know I ought to have written to you, but you might have sent me a line, Ruth."

"So I did, and I believe Dick must have got it."

"The scamp!" exclaimed John.

"Ah, don't say anything unkind now, for it's all happened for the best."

Then Mr. Graham came up, and John went to see about Ruth's luggage, further explanations and news from home being reserved till the evening, when John had finished his day's work.

When Ruth's long story was finished, John sat thoughtful and silent for some time.

"Yes, Ruthie, I do feel you are right. I want a stronger power than even my love for you to keep me from yielding to temptation, and I will from this time give my whole life, with its many sins and mistakes, into the Hand of the One who will forgive all, and make me a new creature," he presently said. [55]

"Thank God for that; we can help each other now, John!"

It was only a humble home to which John took Ruth a few months later; but mutual love and trust made it the happiest place on earth to the two who had waited so long for the fulfilment of their hopes.

"Guess what news I've got, John," said Ruth, with a beaming face one morning, shortly after she had been installed as mistress.

"You've drawn your money out of the Savings Bank, and taken passage in the steamer that leaves for England to-day."

"Foolish boy! No, I've had a letter from Alice, and she says that master and mistress have agreed to give up all intoxicants, and they say it's all through our example. How delighted I am, to be sure, aren't you, John?"

"Yes, little woman, I'm very pleased; but don't say our example, for you set the example, and you ought to have all the credit."

"Ah, John, you know I did it all for your sake, dear," whispered the happy wife.

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[56]

HOW THE FOE CREPT IN.[A]

CHAPTER I.

MODERATE DRINKING.

"I SAY, mother, what do you think's the latest joke?" said a respectable artisan to his wife, as he entered his home with his bag of tools slung across his shoulder.

"I'm sure I can't guess, George," answered the woman, with a pleasant smile on her face as she welcomed her husband.

"Well, don't drop the baby when I tell you. Tim Morris has signed the pledge!"

"Good gracious, George, you don't say so! Why, do you know, his poor wife came in yesterday morning to borrow sixpence, for they hadn't a loaf of bread or a bit of coal in the house; and Tim was out then, drinking like a beast. Really I can't help saying such things, George."

"Well this is what I'm told, Susan. He was picked out of the gutter yesterday evening by some teetotal folks, and taken to one of their meetings; and, drunk as he was, he signed, and then they saw him home, and early this morning they were round to see how he was; and anyhow he declares he is going to stick to it. They've taken him on at the works, and given him another chance of redeeming his character." [57]

"I'm very glad to hear it, George; and if the teetotal folks keep Tim Morris out of the gutter, I'll never say another word against them, and shan't let you either."

"I don't think I shall want to if they do; but I've very little hope, Susan. It'll be the first time that ever I heard of a man who had sunk so low being reclaimed."

"Yes; all I've ever given that kind of people credit for doing, is to get as many little ones into their meetings—Bands of Hope, don't they call them?—and make them sign the pledge, and as soon as ever they get to a sensible age, they find out how foolish they've been, and break all their fine promises. And no wonder, for I don't know how people could get on without their glass of ale or porter two or three times a day. I couldn't for one."

"And I'm sure I should be lost without my pint at dinner and supper," echoed George, adding: "I guess we're the moderate drinkers teetotalers rave about."

"Stuff and nonsense," answered Susan. "Why can't they abuse the creatures who never know when they've had enough for their own good, without wanting to take one of our necessary comforts from us, when we pay our way, and are decent, respectable people?" [58]

"That's just what I say, wife. Such folks have neither sense nor reason on their side. But I can forgive them all their mistakes if they only turn Tim Morris into a sober man."

"Well, sit down, George, and hold the baby, while I put the tea into the pot. Go to father, mother's little pet;" and Susan Dixon placed the well-cared-for baby on her father's knee, where, amidst delighted screams and plunges, she speedily found congenial employment in burying her fat dimpled hands in his masses of brown hair.

"There, there, Mattie, won't that do for you, little lass?" said he, as he gave her back to her mother, crying with disappointment at the sudden termination of her delightful frolic.

"She does get on well, mother," he added, looking with fatherly pride on her rounded limbs and rosy cheeks.

"There's no earthly reason why she shouldn't, with all the care that's taken of her. Oh dear! it makes my heart ache when poor Mrs. Morris steps in here sometimes, with her sickly-looking child fretting in her arms, and our Mattie looking so different; I'd rather bury her, George, than see her like that." [59]

"I tell you, Susan, I think that a man who ruins the health and prospects of his wife and children ought to be treated as a felon, and sent to prison until he'd learnt to behave himself as he ought;" said George.

The conversation turned shortly after upon other matters, and presently, baby being put to bed, the husband and wife settled down to their usual pleasant evening; for never since his marriage, two years before, had George left his wife, after returning from his daily labour, for a longer space of time than was necessary to fetch the ale for supper from one of the neighbouring public-houses. They were perfectly happy in each other, and in the treasure which had been theirs for nine months, and wondered why every one could not rest contented as they did, in the pure delight of home joys.

Day after day, week after week, and even month after month passed away, and still, to George and Susan Dixon's unbounded astonishment, Timothy Morris kept his pledge, and into his wretched home there began to creep an air of comfort. Rags gave place to decent clothing, and the children no longer fled terrified at their father's approach.

"I've got another piece of news for you, Susan," said George one evening: "Timothy Morris is announced to speak at the Temperance Hall to-night."

"Well, I never did! What next?" exclaimed his astonished wife. [60]

"Well, I think the next is that, for the pure fun of the thing, I'll go and hear him, if you don't mind being left alone, my dear."

"Oh, no, not for once, George. Besides, I should like to know what Tim will have to say for himself; and you'll bring me word, won't you, dear?" replied Susan.

"Of course I'll do that; but I must be quick, for two of my mates are going to call and see if I'm coming. I can tell you it's made quite a sensation among the men to-day."

"I dare say it has," said Susan, bustling about, and hurrying her husband's tea.

That evening she waited, with the supper-cloth laid, for an hour past the usual time; and then, wondering what had kept her husband, took her post at the street door. Soon she caught sight of three men coming down the road, and at first thought she recognised George's figure in the moonlight; but hearing from the trio noisy snatches of song and loud laughing, she smiled at the absurdity of her mistake. But yet, as they came nearer, the tones sounded strangely familiar. Her

heart sank as they halted before her, and her husband separated from them, and entered the house, pushing past his wife, and shouting: "Well, good night, mates; we've not signed the pledge, as our friend Tim advised, and don't intend to at present."

"George, where have you been all this time?" said Susan, as she followed him in. [61]

"In the right place for a Briton who never means to be a slave—to be a slave," he answered thickly.

"If this is what temperance meetings do for you, George, I think you'd better stay at home," said his wife in displeased tones.

"Don't be high and mighty, my dear; we weren't going to hear Tim Morris declare that the public-house wasn't a fit place for a respectable man to put his nose inside, without showing him that he'd made a confounded teetotaler's mistake; and being three respectable men, we went in, and took our supper beer there, instead of in our own homes. That's all right, isn't it?" he asked defiantly.

"If you had stopped at your own supper beer it might have been; but it looks more than likely that you drank your own and your wife's share too, judging from appearances," answered Susan bitterly, for she had been feeling the want of her usual stimulant for some time past.

"You can fetch yours, my dear; I've no objection, I'm sure."

"No objection!" Susan felt outraged. If he had been sober, such a word could not have fallen from his lips, for he never would permit her to enter the door of a public-house. There was no help for it now; she must go, for she could not do without her customary glass, and she dared not ask George to go, lest he should be tempted to imbibe still more freely than he had done. [62]

Putting on her bonnet, and seizing a jug, she hurried down the road to the corner where there were four public-houses blazing with light. She chose the quietest; and entering the jug and bottle department, found herself alone, and screened from all eyes, save those of the barmaid, who stepped forward to take her jug.

"Half a pint, please," said Susan.

Suddenly a thought struck her. If she took her ale home George would be sure to want some; and she knew that he had already exceeded by far his usual limit; why should she not stand and drink hers there? There was no one to see her; no one would ever be the wiser. It would only be just for once, she told herself, to put temptation out of her husband's way.

"If you'll kindly bring me a glass, I'll drink it here," she said to the barmaid.

"Certainly, ma'am;" and Susan rapidly drained her glass, and walked home with her empty jug.

If that night the heavy curtain which shrouded the unknown future could have been lifted, and to George and Susan Dixon there could have been revealed their unwritten history, with what shuddering awe would each have turned from the sin-darkened record, and cried with one of old: "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?"

FOOTNOTE:

[A] Reprinted, by permission, from "The Opposite House," published by T. Woolmer, 2 Castle Street, E.C.

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[63]

CHAPTER II.

ITS RESULTS.

"WHERE'S mother, Mrs. Warren?" inquired a girl of about seven or eight years of age, with pallid face, and dress hanging in tatters about her bare feet, as she slowly dragged up the broken stairs to the one room where her father and mother, herself, and four younger children lived and slept.

"You needn't ask me, child. She's locked her door, and the little uns are inside; and here's the key. I 'spect she's off on a spree." The child took the key, and sighing heavily, proceeded on her

way. Two of the children were screaming loudly, but ceased their cries as she entered the room, and began, one to crawl, and the other to toddle, towards the only being in their little world who never struck or kicked them, but tended them with the love and gentleness which, but for her, they would never have known.

"Mammie's left us all alone, Mattie; and Fan and baby has been crying all the morning, and Bob and me's been doing all we can, and they won't do nothing but scream," exclaimed the eldest [64] of the four children in wearied tones.

"That's right, Melie; you're good children; but I've come home, and 'll look after the lot of you. What's for dinner? Did mammie say?"

"There's some crusts left up on the mantel," answered Melie.

"Bob, you just climb up and fetch 'em down, and I'll nurse the baby, and, Fan, you come right away and sit by me." Mattie picked up the dirty, tear-stained baby, and seated herself on the only chair in the room. She had been to school all the morning, and, while ostensibly puzzling her little brain with the mysteries of "the three R's," her heart had been full of fear for those little ones in the house. What if her mother should leave them with the door unlocked, and Fan and baby should find their way headlong down those dark, steep stairs? Or, suppose the window in their room should by any means become unfastened, and one of them should fall to the pavement beneath; for Mattie remembered that, only the week before, a drunken mother had let her baby drop from her arms out of the window at the top of the house into the court below, from whence it had been picked up a shapeless, bleeding mass. So she was greatly relieved that everything had gone well in her absence. As for Fan's and baby's crying, that was to be expected while she was away.

"I shan't go to school this afternoon; 'taint to be expected as I can, although teacher'll be just [65] mad, being as it's near 'xamination time," declared Mattie.

"That's prime, Mattie! What'll we do? Not stay up here all the time?" cried Bob.

"In course not. We'll have our dinner, and then we'll just get a breath of air in the park. It'll do baby good; won't it, darling?" said Mattie, stooping over her puny charge as fondly as if he were the bonniest baby in the land, instead of a feeble, wan-faced infant, upon whom, as indeed upon each of the group which surrounded him, there was stamped the unmistakable imprint of an inherited curse.

"I'm glad mammie's out, Mattie. I wish you was our mammie, and could take us clean away," said Bob, hanging about Mattie's chair.

"When I get bigger and can earn money, that's what I'm going to do, you know, Bob. Me, and Melie, and you'll just work and keep the children, and we won't have 'em knocked about, poor little mites, will we?"

"No, we won't, but I wish we was big enough now," sighed Bob, to whom the tempting prospect was sufficiently familiar and delightful to help him to bear bravely the privation of his daily lot.

"Well, we ain't, so it's no use wishing we was," responded matter-of-fact Mattie; "but I'll tell you what I do wish, and that is as mammie and daddie'd just turn over a new leaf, and stop the drinking. Then we'd never need to be talking of running away and leaving 'em; for I tell you, we'd [66] all pretty soon know the difference."

"Tell us what a nice home we'd have afore long, and what jolly things we'd get to eat," said Bob.

"Don't you be so greedy, Bob. 'Tain't the want of good things to eat as troubles me so much. It's the rows, and the swearing, and the kicking, and beating, as takes the life out of one," and Mattie's face grew dark as she spoke.

"Mattie," asked Melie, as she munched away at her crust; "do all mammies get drunk like ourn?"

"They do about here, I b'lieve," answered Mattie, somewhat dubiously; "but lor, no, child, in course they don't. There's the lady in the shop where we buy our penn'orths of bread, as allers is as kind and pleasant spoken to her little uns as—as—"

A comparison was not speedily forthcoming, but Bob finished his sister's sentence by saying: "Like you are to all of us, Mattie."

"I'd hate to speak cross to bits of things like you," answered Mattie loftily, but with a little glow at her heart because of the spontaneous tribute to her sisterly care. "We'd better be off, I'm thinking," she said presently, and tying an old rag under the baby's chin by way of head-gear, she passed her own battered straw hat to Melie, saying:

"You can wear it this afternoon; I'll be quite hot enough carrying baby, without putting anything on, I guess." [67]

As for Bob and little Fan, the lack of outdoor apparel troubled them not at all; indeed, the trouble would have been if any such unusual and uncomfortable addition to their scanty wardrobe had been forthcoming.

Rejoicing in their liberty, and strong in the protection of the elder sister, they slowly threaded their way through crowded thoroughfares, until they came to the outskirts of the great manufacturing town, where the park of which Mattie had spoken was situated.

"That's right! we've got here at last! But you're real heavy, baby, I do declare," said Mattie, as she sank exhausted on the first seat with her burden; and although any one else would have considered that, judging from the said baby's appearance, such a statement was decidedly unfounded, Mattie being small for her own not very advanced age, might, for obvious reasons, have been excused for making the rash charge.

"Now, be sure and behave yourselves. Don't get wild, or touch them pretty flowers, or that man in the buttons there'll be down on us in a jiffy, and turn us out quicker than we comed in," said Mattie, when they had rested and recovered themselves after their weary trudge. The afternoon waned at last, and the children turned their steps homeward.

"I wonder whether mammie's comed home; we'll catch it if she has," said Melie apprehensively. [68]

"Don't you be a bothering of your head about that," replied Mattie sharply, turning upon the child, who was lagging behind with her little sister. "Mammie's safe enough, I'll be bound, somewheres till midnight, and she'll be too dead drunk when she comes in to do anything but tumble into a corner like a pig; that's a mercy!"

Melie looked cheered at the information, and trudged on bravely. Just as they were about to enter their dingy court, Bob caught sight of a man who was walking slowly down the road with a placard in front of him and another behind.

"Mattie, just look at that funny man," he exclaimed.

"Oh, haven't you ever seen the likes of him afore? Wait a minute,—and I'll see what it says on them boards," and Mattie read,—as what girl of her tender years, however destitute and forlorn, in this age of educational advantages could not?—"A Band of Hope Meeting will be held at the —— Road Board Schools this evening, at half-past six. All children will be welcome."

"Why, that's my school," said Mattie; "I declare I should like to go, though what on earth a Band of Hope Meeting is, goodness knows, for I don't."

"Don't leave us again, Mattie," urged Melie; "we'll be so lonesome by oursel's."

"Let's see," said Mattie thoughtfully; "it says, 'all children will be welcome.' I've a good mind to take the lot of you; and if they won't let us in with baby, why, we can come back again, I s'pose." [69]

"What a heap of treats we are having, Mattie! You're a real good 'un!" cried Bob, cutting a somersault in view of the unusual and delightful combination of events.

"You, Bob," called Mattie, somewhat ungraciously it might seem, "stop that, and help Melie along with Fan."

Tea, which had consisted of the remains from dinner, being over, a neighbouring church clock chimed the hour, and Mattie prepared for the evening entertainment. Baby was sleeping, and resented Mattie's attempts to remove the worst of the grime from his face; but she persevered, for she felt that the credit of the family was entirely in her hands, and she was not going to risk losing it for the sake of sundry struggles and tears from its youngest member. They were all ready at last, and Mattie surveyed the effect of her handiwork with satisfaction.

"Now, you all jest keep behind me, and don't be grinning, or up to any of your larks, or they won't let you in," said Mattie, as they neared the building.

She presented herself before the door with the baby asleep in her arms, the other children tremblingly bringing up the rear. A gentleman with a kindly face was standing near the entrance.

"Do you think you can manage your baby, my little woman?" he asked, stooping to Mattie. [70]

"Bless you, yes, sir. He's better with me than his own mammie, and'll sleep like a top all the time; and," she added, glancing behind, "these 'ere little uns belong to me too, and if you'll let us all in, I'll see as they behave theirselves."

"I'm very glad to see you all, my dears, come in;" and, with his heart aching at the revelation of the misery which was written in unmistakable characters on the faces of these young children, the gentleman led them to prominent places near the platform.

Oh, the rich enjoyment of the next hour! The wonderful music, the fine singing, and the simple words from the two or three gentlemen who were there, fell upon Mattie's ears with telling effect, and after the meeting was over, she exchanged a few hurried words with Melie and Bob, and then they all went forward to the table in front of the platform.

"Please, sir," said Mattie to the secretary who sat there, "you said as any as wanted to sign against the drink was to come to you after you'd finished talking; and me, and Melie, and Bob here wants to sign, only they can't write yet."

"We'll manage that, my dear; but have you thought about this signing and what it means?"

"Oh, yes, sir; it means as we're never to put our lips to mammie's drops when we fetch 'em

from the public, and never to touch the drink at all."

"Yes, that's quite right," said the secretary, with a half smile. "I see you know all about it, and will doubtless keep your own pledge; but what about these little ones? Will they understand and [71] remember that they mustn't touch the drink when once they've signed against it?"

"Don't you be a-troubling of yourself about them, sir; they're little, but they're sharp enough, and I'll look after 'em," replied the elder sister.

"I suppose you're mother, then?" said the secretary, glancing compassionately down at the sleeping child in Mattie's arms.

"Pretty nigh," answered Mattie, concisely. "Tell me where I've to put my name; and, Melie, you sit down and hold the baby a minute."

The name was carefully written, and the other children made crosses in due form, each receiving a bright pledge-card, which they were told to hang up in their room; then, after receiving an invitation to attend another meeting of the same kind the following week, they left the place.

"Well, we've done something now," said Mattie, as they emerged into the street. "I'll tell you what, if we stick to it, as in course we shall, we'll have a jolly home one day, with no drinking and no beating; and, Bob, you'll be able to stuff away on the fat of the land yet."

"Prime!" ejaculated Bob, smacking his lips in gleeful anticipation of the good time coming.

"We'll get Fan and baby to bed, and then we'll see about hanging our cards somewheres. They'll not fetch anything at the pop-shop, so mammie won't be carrying 'em off, that's one [72] comfort."

The three cards were presently hung up, affording a strange contrast to the begrimed and broken walls; and then the wearied children crept into their corners, and, on the rags which alone separated them from the floor, they slept the sleep of innocence and childhood.

There was a staggering step on the broken stairs at midnight, and at the familiar sound Mattie woke, and drew her baby brother closer to her protecting arms. The door was pushed noisily open, and some one stumbled across the room, muttering:

"Where's them brats, I wonder?"

Mattie held her breath, and a moment later she heard a roll on the floor, and knew that her miserable mother would lie where she had fallen in drunken slumber until the morning. As for her father, he was seldom able to mount the stairs; but, if he came home at all, lay at the foot, until aroused in the morning by his landlady's shrill tones, and ordered to seek his own room. So Mattie composed herself to sleep again; as, under such happy circumstances, what drunkard's child might not?

She was awoke next morning by the baby's fretful wail, and, the others beginning to stir, she sat up and pointed with a warning finger to her still sleeping mother.

"If you wake her, you'll catch it, you know, so hold your noise now, and I'll see if I can't get [73] something for you to eat," she hoarsely whispered.

With stealthy movement she crept to her mother's side, and, finding her way to the pocket of her dress, she put her hand in and drew out a solitary penny. Holding it up, and nodding delightedly over her prize, she picked up the baby and disappeared down the stairs. When she returned there was a good-sized piece of steaming bread in her hand, and baby was already ravenously devouring his share.

"Eat it up, quick now, afore she wakes," whispered Mattie; and the children, nothing loth, soon left not a crumb to be seen.

"We don't often get such luck as that," chuckled Mattie, thinking of other times when the need had been as great, and not even a penny loaf wherewith to satisfy the cravings of her hungry charge had been forthcoming.

"Mammie's waking up," whispered Bob, shrinking back into his corner; and the little group in silence fixed their fascinated gaze upon the woman to whom they owed their being, as she yawned and stretched, and, finally, with a succession of groans, turned over, and faced her children.

Can it be the same? Are we not doing Susan Dixon a cruel injustice as we fancy that in yonder bloated face, with its bleared eyes and framework of dishevelled hair, we can discover a resemblance to the bright, happy wife, who, seven years before, had been so unsparing in her [74] condemnation of those who, for the sake of indulging a degraded appetite, wrecked their own prospects, and blasted the young life and future happiness of their helpless offspring? Ah, no! for she, who so proudly had boasted of her own strength, had also been overcome and laid low by the mighty tyrant.

Little by little, with many a struggle at first, and many a fair-sounding promise, did she turn from the beaten track she had marked out for herself, and in the security of which she had prided herself, until now the very desire for a better life seemed hopelessly crushed with every trace of

womanly feeling. She looked about in a half-stupified fashion for a while, then raised herself on her elbow, still continuing to groan.

"What's the matter, mammie?" Mattie ventured to ask.

"My head's fit to burst, child; you must fetch me a drop or I shall just go crazy," replied Susan, in thick, husky tones.

"Where's the money, mammie?" tremblingly asked the child, well knowing that the last coin had been spent in their frugal breakfast.

Susan felt in her pocket, and, to Mattie's intense relief, withdrew her hand, simply saying: "Drat it, every penny gone again! Just like my luck!"

Her glance went round the room, but there was absolutely nothing within those four walls which would fetch the price of a morning dram. Presently her eyes rested upon those three bright [75] patches hanging against the discoloured wall, with a curious expression of wonder.

"What's them?" she asked at length.

"They're pretty cards as was given us by a gent yesterday, and he said we was to hang 'em up," answered Mattie, wondering what the effect of her reply would be, and devoutly hoping that, whatever untimely fate awaited the cards, she and the little ones might escape with no more than their usual share of rough and ready treatment.

"Let's look, can't you?" were the next impatient words; and Mattie took down the three pledges, and, handing them to her mother, stood patiently by, awaiting the result of the prolonged investigation. She was never more surprised than when it came. Tossing the cards aside, Susan threw her hands over her face, and rocked herself backwards and forwards in an agony of shame and remorse, while floods of tears poured through her fingers.

Mattie bore the sight as long as she could, and then said: "Don't cry, mammie; if you're bad, I'll run and fetch the doctor."

But Susan took no notice, and probably had not heard her child's words. By and bye her tears ceased, and she staggered to her feet, saying: "Oh, God! that I should have come to this, while he —"

What did her grief, her broken words mean? The children stood aghast; and, at that juncture, [76] heavy footsteps were heard on the stairs, and directly the husband and father entered the room; his clear brow, fearless eye, and manly bearing all gone, and in their stead, darkness, sullenness, and feebleness.

"What's these?" he asked, for the gaudy cards had been thrown to the very entrance of the room, and in another moment his foot would have rested upon them.

Mattie sprang forward and placed them, without a word, in his hands. Susan crossed the room, and came to her husband's side.

"Who's been putting the brats up to this?" he asked, half angrily, turning to her.

"I don't know," she answered; "but, oh, George, look at the signature, and think what that man used to be, and how we couldn't find a name bad enough for him; and now he's respectable and well-to-do, and me and you's sunk lower than ever he did. Oh, dear! oh, dear!" and again Susan's sobs shook the room.

"Timothy Morris, as I live!" exclaimed George Dixon, dropping the cards in sheer amazement, while upon his mind there rushed a score of memories, some joyous and bright; others, and these of later days, sad and sin-shadowed.

"Don't carry on so, Susan," he said; "it makes me feel bad, for I've been as much in the wrong as you."

"Look at the signature, and think what that man used to be."—*Page 76*.

"Oh, George, I wouldn't care if I'd only cursed and ruined myself; but look there!" and she pointed to the five children, who, half terrified at the scene, were huddling together in the corner. [77]

"Come here, Mattie," she said; "go to your father, child, and ask him if he remembers the golden-haired, bonnie baby who sat on his knee and pulled his hair when he came home, nigh upon eight years ago, and told me that the drunken sot, whose name is on your pledge-card, had turned teetotal. Ask him if you look like that baby at all. Oh, you needn't turn away, George, for you know there's but one answer. And what's made the difference between that happy home, and this beastly place? and what's made me and you more like brutes than the loving couple we were, eh, George?"

With streaming eyes Susan stood before her husband, waiting for the answer to her questions.

Gnashing his teeth, as if in despair, he hissed out: "It's the moderate drinking as has worked all the mischief, woman, if you want to know; and may God's curse rest upon it!"

Mattie began to understand at length the meaning of her parents' distress, and hastened to proffer the only advice that was in her power to give.

"Daddie, mammie," she said, "won't you come and sign the pledge too? Then you won't never touch the drink again, and we'll have a nice home; and me, and Melie, and Bob'll stay with you, and never run away as we've been a talking of."

Then Melie and Bob came and said: "Oh, please do! We're so hungry and miser'ble all the time; and if you'll only give up the drink we'll be so good, and never want any beating." [78]

George looked at Susan across the upturned faces of the children, and Susan looked back at him wistfully, earnestly.

"Susan," said George, in low, troubled tones; "if I promise now, can I ever keep my word? for I'm raging for a drop this minute."

Susan might have answered, "So am I," but, with a touch of returning womanliness, she hid her own suffering that she might minister to the need of the man who thus confessed his weakness.

"George," she answered steadily, "I had a praying mother once, and so had you. I once knew how to pray myself, and so did you; and if ever our mothers' prayers for us are going to be answered, it'll be now; and if ever we begin to pray for ourselves again, it'll be this very minute, or we shall be lost for ever!" And Susan fell on her knees, and passionately poured out her whole soul that forgiveness might be granted to herself and her erring husband, and that to their weakness and feebleness there might descend the almighty power and perpetual help of an Omnipotent Saviour.

Was that prayer answered? Could two souls so bound and tied by Satan's strongest fetters be loosed and set free, no longer slaves of a tyrant but children of a King? Let the new home in a new land, and the subdued brightness of their faces, and the happy abandonment of their children's glee answer, and say that once again the captives of the mighty have been taken away, and the prey of the terrible delivered. [79]

In his own land, Timothy Morris hears, from time to time, of the well doing of his former neighbours; and rejoices that he has been the humble instrument of bringing light and succour to a household which had been darkened and degraded for years through the insidious advances of moderate drinking.

[80]

THE COMMITTEE'S DECISION.

THE weekly Band of Hope meeting had been carried on through the long winter months with vigour and success, and now on the evening of one of the first spring days, its committee had met to decide upon the all-important question as to whether the meetings should be discontinued through the summer months.

"I certainly think it would be a pity to hold the meetings on the long bright evenings," said Mr. Jones, and, judging from the expression on many of the faces, his opinion was shared by several.

"It would be a downright shame to coop up the children in a close school-room when they might be enjoying themselves in the bright sunshine," said Mr. Gale.

[81] It may be here stated that the committee was comprised of equal numbers of abstainers and non-abstainers, to which latter class the afore-mentioned speakers belonged. From a corner, a nervous little man summoned up courage to suggest the possibility of the younger members of the Band of Hope breaking their pledge, if they had not a constant reminder in the shape of their attractive weekly meeting.

"That goes to prove what is my firm conviction, that these kind of affairs, popular as they have become, accomplish little of what they profess to, for although pledges of total abstinence are taken from the young folks who attend in large numbers, it only needs a trivial pretext such as a change of residence, or the suspension of their meetings, and they become forgetful of the pledge which they have signed," said a prominent member of the committee.

"You are quite right, my dear sir," replied a middle-aged gentleman beside him; "as I can testify by my own experience. When I was a lad of seven or eight, I attended a Band of Hope meeting. Like all children, I was readily influenced by others, and as most of the little folks who attended signed the pledge, I did the same. Two or three years afterwards my parents moved out of the neighbourhood, and it never occurred to my childish mind that I was just as much bound to keep my pledge as though I had still been attending the meeting where I signed it. So I partook with my brothers and sisters of the daily stimulant which found its way to our table, to the [82] amusement of my father, who had looked upon my previous self-denial as a boyish whim."

"I believe your experience is by no means an isolated one," added another member, complacently stroking his beard; "I myself joined at least two Bands of Hope when I was a youngster; but I don't belong to the cold-water ranks to-day."

"Come, gentlemen, we are not here to discuss whether the Band of Hope answers the end it has in view; but whether it is advisable to give its juvenile members a long summer vacation. Will one of you make a proposition? and we will take the vote of the meeting," said the chairman.

The nervous member made an uneasy movement, and looked anxiously around, but before he could summon up courage to open his mouth, a gentleman, who had hitherto remained silent, rose, and commenced to speak.

"Mr. Chairman," he began, "I had no intention of making my voice heard when I came into this meeting, but my soul is too deeply stirred to allow me to preserve silence. Sir, it has been suggested that Bands of Hope accomplish little of what they profess to do, and in proof of that, two of our non-abstaining friends have readily confessed that in their boyhood they were associated with Bands of Hope. Sir, there doubtless is a percentage of children who carelessly or ignorantly take upon themselves these solemn vows, and fail to fulfil them. I may add that to my [83] knowledge, many a drunkard has gone down to his dishonoured grave uttering the impotent wish that he had kept the pledge of his childhood. But, sir, I am in a position to say that such percentage is very small, and that the juvenile temperance movement in this country is doing a mighty work. We are saving the children, and sending into many a sin-darkened home, the little ones as messengers of hope and salvation. And not alone into poverty-stricken courts and alleys,

but into abodes of the better classes where the drink demon has asserted his supremacy, do our youthful members find their way. Yet, sir, I am not ashamed to say, that these children need the reminder of their weekly meeting. They are but weak, and temptation is oftentimes strong, whether conveyed to them by the sight and smell of the intoxicants which many of them have to fetch, or, as in the case of our friend who has spoken, placed upon the well-spread table within their easy reach. Sir, if for the summer months we could compel the publicans, and all who are licensed to sell alcohol in any shape or form, to close their premises, and take a long vacation, and could we during that time banish from the homes of our land every temptation to strong drink, then we might afford to give up our meetings for the next few months; but while the monster Intemperance is ceaselessly devastating homes and blighting lives in all classes and [84] communities, let us not dream of giving our endeavours to meet and vanquish the strong man armed a summer holiday."

The speaker wiped his brow and sat down, and significant glances went round the room. When a minute later the votes were taken, there were found to be only two members who did not cordially agree with the proposal that the meetings of the Band of Hope should be continued all through the year.

[85]

THE RIGHT HAND THAT OFFENDED.

"EH, lass, but thou'rt a bad un ter be talkin' o' turnin' a new leaf; with t' cursin', swearin' toongue, and t' drinkin' waays, dost think it's gooin' ter be so foine and eaasy ter gi'e t' all o'er in sich a moighty hoory?"

The question was addressed by a stalwart labouring man to his wife, as he stood in the doorway of his little cottage, one of a few that nestled at the foot of one of the Yorkshire hills, and from which could be seen stretching yet further below, the smoky chimneys of a large manufacturing town, in such as which England's wealth and commercial prosperity are so largely centred.

"Lad, thee moight well woonder at a wicked wench loike thy lass talkin' o' gettin' saaved; ay, and thee may sneer as mooch as thee loikes; aw mun reeap as aw ha' sowed, and aw deserve thy [86] haard woords, and thee'll't not foind me makkin' ony raash booast; but aw mun saay ter thee 'at, He who saaved t' thief on t' cross caanst saave a big sinner loike me; ay, and keep me from t' swearin' and t' drinkin'," answered his wife, who was busily engaged in sweeping a filthy floor, preparatory to bestowing upon the blackened stones a hearty scrubbing.

"Weel, aw'll not heender thee, loike some 'ud do, if thee'll't see ter my comforts as thou hast t' mornin'," replied John Ibbetson, thinking with satisfaction of the unaccustomed luxury of a well-prepared breakfast, which had been awaiting him on his arrival from his work close by, at an early hour, that same morning. Pursuing his way thither again, he thought of the strange events that had been crowded into a short space of time. The invitation to the preaching of an evangelist in the Mission Room on the hill-side, that had been given to his wife yesterday morning; the call of a kindly-disposed neighbour, who herself regularly attended the little room, just before the evening service commenced; and then the sight he had witnessed of the neat, respectable neighbour, and his ill-clothed, dirty wife, going up the hill together. He thought of the strange scene that met his view on his return to his home after spending the evening hours as usual with a neighbour, smoking and conversing on the topics of the day, for John prided himself that his [87] figure had never darkened the doorway of the wretched tavern that was his wife's continual resort.

"T' lass knows all about t' inside o' t' beastly plaace, and 'at's enoogh for me," he would say in reply to any invitation from its many frequenters to join them in their social evenings. He never went nearer than when compelled. Occasionally he waited at some little distance for the stumbling figure of his wife, in order to help her along the solitary path that led to their miserable dwelling. But no such task lay before him when he left his neighbour's cheerful

fireside; neither was his wife lying in a state of helpless intoxication across the bed; nor was she even sitting muddled and stupified, waiting his arrival to make the cottage resound with her oaths, when he should refuse to supply her with the means for further revelry and drunken debauch. In the usually empty grate a glowing fire shed its warmth and radiance through the room; on the table there was a jug of steaming coffee, and a pile of bread and butter; and, strangest of all, on the well-swept hearth were his dilapidated slippers warmed and ready, and close beside them his chair, evidently drawn from its corner in expectation of his arrival. Half suspicious of some new design against his peace, he looked dubiously around, and only ventured to say: "Thou'rt home early, lass, t' neaght?"

"Ay, lad, thou sayest it; and more's t' shame, 'at aw've ever been aught but hoom ter greeat [88]
thee; aw've gotten good oop at yond meetin' hoose t' neaght, and aw've proomised t' Looard and t' fouks 'at aw'll gie oop t' alehoose and t' drink; aw've been a bad woife ter thee, and a weecked mother ter t' childer; but t' Looard in mercy ha' forgi'en me all my seens; and aw'm 'at happy aw could daance for t' joy. Dost heear me, lad?" she continued, as her husband stared in dumbfounded fashion at her.

"Thee may weel stare thee een oot wi' wonner, for aw waalked streeaght ter t' tap yonder, and thinkin' ter mysen, now t' Looard ha' weshed my blaack heaart t' least aw could do 'ud be t' wesh my blaack faace, aw didn't gi'e o'er rubbin' and scrubbin' till aw left thee little enoogh sooap t' wesh thysen coom t' mornin', and t' floor 'lt ha' its turn t' morrow."

"Lass, if 'at thee's been saayin' be true, then aw mun saay t' Looard, aboot whom thee taalks so glib, 'll ha' His haands full to keeap thee oot o' meescheef for a while; it's a seaght more nor aw could do," said John, at length finding his voice.

"Thou'rt reaght enoogh, lad; but His hands are aye poowerful, so aw'm toold. Maybe, thee 'ud goo ter t' chapel wi' me to-morrow neaght, and hear t' preachin'; it's wonnerful and foine," and then Jane handed a steaming cup of coffee to her husband, and waited his reply with some trepidation, for, in her simple soul, there had already sprung up the desire, sure proof of the reality of the Spirit's work in any heart that another should partake of the new life that had come [89]
to her.

"See thee, lass; thee'lt just stop 'at koind o' taalk: aw'll not goo to yond plaace coom a greeat while; thee'lt have ter show t' work's reeal wi' thee, afore thee sees me walkin' oop t' hill aside o' thee; aw've no drinkin', swearin' waays ter gi'e o'er, thee knows," said John.

"Ay, ay, John, 'at's true, and thou'st been paatient and forbearin' wi' me, and wi' God's help, aw'll mak' thee a better woife in t' future, and mebbe when thou see'st what religion's done for me, thou'lt tak' thy waay wi' me oop to yond little room," hopefully replied Sarah.

Well might John Ibbetson pursue his way as in a dream, with such a new experience of domestic comfort to engage his thoughts; yet, reaching the farm on which he worked, he drew a deep sigh as he turned to his ploughing, and muttered: "Ay, it proomises fair, but t' lass'll never hoold oot aw'm feared."

"Lad," said his wife, as they sat at tea before the shining grate; "thou'lt not saay aught agaainst me gooin' to t' meetin' to-noight; aw'm but weeak, and t' seaght o' t' happy faaces oop yonder'll do me a power o' good; aw'll settle doon to spend t'neaghts wi' thee, if thou wilt, by and bye."

"Go where thou wilt, and welcoom, lass, if 'twill help thee to keeap from t' alehouse," replied John, too wise to utter the surprise that nearly overwhelmed him on hearing his hitherto [90]
unmanageable wife appeal to him for permission to spend the evening away from her home, the claims of which had been so completely disregarded by her in the past.

As the weeks went by John's fears respecting his wife's steadfastness seemed likely to be unrealised; for, under the inspiration of her new life, the home, her children, and herself underwent a thorough reformation, and her husband began to breathe freely as he marked the visible signs of the change in his wife's heart. But many a wise head was significantly shaken, and many a sage tongue whispered: "Bide a while, and ye'll see it 'll all end i' smooke; Saarah Ann Ibbetson's looved her coops too weel to gi'e un oop in sooch a hurry."

It was Sunday evening, and Mrs. Ibbetson was seated beside her fireside, spelling out with great pains the last part of the chapter which had been read before the sermon at chapel that night. It was the ninth chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, and she had commenced at the thirtieth verse, but had not found the passage which had troubled and surprised her whilst hearing it read; but travelling down the verses with her forefinger pointing to each line, lest her eye, unaccustomed to the task, should mislead her, and some of the sacred words be passed over unread, at last she reached the forty-third verse.

"It's un!" she triumphantly exclaimed. [91]

"Eh, but it's a haard un!" was her verdict when she had finished it; "Aw 'll raad un agaain;" and she read: "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched."

She put the Bible away, and gazing into the fire, mused aloud: "Aw'm daazed aboot yond text; aw never heeard loike on't; but aw'm thinkin' it's only fair; if t' reet hand offeends cut un off, and serve un reet too. T' blessed Looard, He knows all about it, He does, and He'd raather see His childer waalk inter t' glory wi' one hand than know they'd gone doon inter yond daarkness wi'

their two seenful hands ter burn ter all 'ternity; ay, it's plaain enoogh for a poor eegnorant lass loike mysen to get un," and having settled the difficult question to her own satisfaction, without the aid of commentators, Sarah Ann rose and bustled about getting her husband's supper.

John Ibbetson was hurrying home one night shortly after the above occurrences pleasantly anticipating the now usual sight of a clean hearth, a waiting supper, and a welcoming wife; but pushing open the door he found the room in total darkness, and on striking a light he saw it was unoccupied.

"Maybe t' lass 'as grown weary and gone ter bed," said John to himself, resolutely turning from a horrible fear that fell coldly on his heart. Taking up the candle he stepped into the sleeping [92]
room, but the bed was undisturbed, and he came back into the kitchen, muttering: "T' chapel's all daark and cloosed, where can t'lass be? anyhow aw'll gi'e a look roound," and taking up his hat, John passed into the darkness without. Shrieks and shouts, alas! too well known to be mistaken, fell on his ear. Hastening forward he took his wife from the hands of those who were bringing her towards her home; but she broke from him, and staggering on with uncertain footsteps, entered the cottage first. He relit the candle, then facing her with folded arms and a stern brow, as she dropped into a chair, he said: "So thee'st been at t' cursed drink agaain, after all t' foine proomises, and thee a-foolin me, poor daft un 'at I be, to a' gi'en ear ter all thou'st had ter say. What deevil has been temptin' thee, lass, to-neet, to forget all t' chapel goin' and t' friends who ha' looked after thee so weel?"

But the only answer that Sarah Ann seemed capable of making was the reiteration: "Aw've got ter cut un off, lad; aw'll cut un off, t' wicked haand;" and the poor woman struck at the offending member with such savage force, that her husband interfered and dragged her in sullen despair to her bed.

He awoke the next morning with a burden on his heart that he could not account for, until the recollection of the events of the previous night flashed into his mind. [93]

"Eh, but she's a reet down bad un; what's t' use o' me pullin' one waay, and her t' other; t' poor childer's just dragged oop by t' hair o' t' head; aw'll ha' no more on't, aw've gi'en her her chances o'er and o'er, but she's coom ter t' end o' tether at laast; t' wicked hussy shaal goo," the poor fellow groaned; and with this resolve firmly fixed in his mind, he turned out of bed, and betook himself to the kitchen. There, to his unbounded astonishment, was his wife, whom he had missed, sitting beside the fire, with her arms folded in her apron, and bearing on her face the impress of keen suffering. On the table there was a cup and saucer placed for him, and the kettle was hissing and steaming on the glowing coals.

"Tak' summat afore thee goos to woork, lad; aw caan't help thee mysen, till t' pain's a bit o'er," said Sarah Ann in a trembling voice, watching her husband's face in evident fear.

"Aw want nought ter eat; thou'lt not soft sooap me so eaasy," replied John, gruffly; but looking at her again, he said: "What's the maatter wi' thee noo?"

"See thee, lad," and the woman uncovered her apron, and revealed a sickening sight; a right hand, blackened, shrivelled, and quivering with the torture of the fiery ordeal through which it had been made to pass.

Strong man though he was, John Ibbetson staggered back in horror.

"Lass," gasped he, with his eyes yet riveted, spell-bound, on the hideous spectacle; "lass, what [94]
hast thee done wi' t' poor haand?"

"Fetch yond Bible from t' shelf, lad, and read t' neanth chaapter o' Maark, and t' forty-third verse."

John obeyed, and read aloud the verse which had been the subject of his wife's meditations a few Sabbath evenings before.

"Noo, lad, aw'll tell thee all aboot it. Thee'd just goon ter woork yester morn, when Emma Ward stepped in, and 'Lass,' she said, 'thee mun coom oop t' hill wi' me, for Jim Green's little un's deein', and t' mother's well nigh craazed;' thee knows aw couldn't be unneeboorloike, so aw good, and gi'ed a helpin' haand, and they o'er persuaded me ter tak' a glass o' waarm speerit to keep t' cold oot, and I set my faace against it at first, but it looked so temptin', at aw stretched oot t' reet haand and finished glaas cleean off, and coomin' hoom, deevil, he saaid: 'thee ud best feenish oop at t' ale-hoose,' and aw were paarched for more o' cursed stoof, and t' knows t' rest; and coom t' morn, aw saaid, 'Aw'll cut un off, t' reet haand 'at took glaass, for aw'll goo inter t' kingdom maimed sooner aw'll goo to yond plaace o' daarkness wi' my two haands,' and aw'd gotten t' axe ter chop un off, when aw thowt o' thee and the childer, and how thee and them 'ud miss t' haand, and aw coomd baack ter kitchen, and said: 'Aw'll gi'en a good lesson, anyhow; aw'll gi'en a taaste o' t' fire as'll mind un o' t' fire 'at burns for aye', and aw put un in and held un in, and thee 'lt ha'e ter see ter thy own meals coom a while, and if t' nasty thing offends again aw'll cut un off, and [95]
thee'lt ha' ter do t' best thee can for thysen, for aw've promised to mind all t' Book says;" and Sarah Ann turned the apron carefully over the poor maimed hand, and rocked herself to and fro, in her cruel pain.

"Thee's a braave lass; and if thou'rt gooin' ter turn t' faace from t' drink agaain, aw'll hould on ter thee, and help thee; but thee'st been reeadin' t' Bible oopside doon, aw reeckon; aw never heeard tell o' fouks maimin' theirsens in looike faashion; thee'ud best get paarson ter mak' t'

verse reet;" and John walked away to his work with new thoughts stirring in his breast; and a tenderness, to which it had long been a stranger, swelling within his heart at the remembrance of his suffering wife, who was so earnest in her purpose of breaking through the power of evil habit, and, at all costs, finding her way into the kingdom of heaven.

"T' lass shall not goo alone," was his decision at length, and John Ibbetson made up his mind that next Sabbath he and his wife would walk up the hill in company, and for the first time since their marriage, enter the house of God together.

The news spread like wildfire through the village that "John Ibbetson's lass had well-nigh burned her hand ter t' bone for tamperin' wi' t' drink agaain;" and in the forenoon of the same day, the neighbour who had persuaded Sarah Ann to accompany her to that special service where [96] a new life had dawned for her some months before, called to see what truth there was in the tale.

As soon as she had entered the door Mrs. Ibbetson greeted her.

"Aw thowt thee 'ud coom, Jane; hast t' heard aw got at t' drink last een? but," she said, holding up her mutilated hand in triumph, "Aw've gi'ed un a good waarmin' for its sen."

"Eh, but it's an awfu' burnin'!" exclaimed the neighbour; "dost think, thou poor lass, at 'll keep thee from t' drink?"

"If it doesn't, then aw mun cut un off, for t' Book saays it, and aw'm bound to mind what t' Book saays," answered Mrs. Ibbetson.

"Saarah Ann," said her startled neighbour; "If thee thinks 'at t' good Looard bids thee hurt and maim thysen, thou'st maade a mistaak."

"Nay, Jane, didn't preacher saay t' other neet from t' Book: 'If t' reet haand offeend thee, cut un off'? ay, and aw foound un, and reead un mysen when aw coomed hoom, and it's no mistaake, lass," said Mrs. Ibbetson eagerly.

"But thee hast maade an awfu' mistaake, Saarah Ann; t' wooards be there, sure enoogh, but they doan't mean fowks mun goo cuttin' and hackin' at their own flesh. T' blessed Looard were poonished for t' sin o' t' world, and we've no reet ter be thinkin' we mun poonish oursen for our fro'ard waays." [97]

Puzzled and dumbfounded, poor Sarah Ann looked at her visitor for a while, and then asked despondingly:

"And what do yond woords mean, Jane?"

"Aw'll mak' it plaain ter thee, Saarah Ann; see here! t' knows t' good o' t' reet haand; thee never puts t' left ter aught if t' reet 'll do t' wooark, and t' Looard knows there be many a sin 'at's loike t' reet haand ter His fouks, and there's many a fouk as 'ud saay o' t' drunkin', swearin' waays: 'Aw can't gi'e un oop; aw mun ha'e a drop, or rap oot t' oath soom while, and t' good Looard 'll forgi'e un and let un inter t' kingdom by and bye;' but what does t' good Looard saay?"

"Cut un off, cut un off," called out Sarah Ann, who had been hanging on her neighbour's interpretation with open mouth.

"Ay, lass, thee sees it, and thee mun be willin' to cut un off before t' Looard 'll gi'e thee His forgiveness, and let thee inter t' kingdom o' His graace below; thee knows now 'at He never meant t' poor haand ter suffer for t' sin o' t' soul; if thee sins thee 'lt suffer; but thou mun never tak' t' poonishment o' thysen agaain; thou'lt cut off t' drink, lass; thou mun promise 'at ter t' Looard and t' fouks."

"Ay, ay, Jane, aw'll promise 'at! aw'm not loike to forget coom a greeat while wi' t' hand ter mind me," said Sarah Ann, looking regretfully down at the useless member. [98]

"Aw'll see to curin' un; aw've soom rare ointment oop at hoom; aw'll fetch un, and then aw'll coom and redd oop for thee;" and so saying Jane left the house, and sore as her bodily anguish was, Sarah Ann knelt and thanked the Lord that He had borne the punishment for all her sins; and once more, in a very ignorant fashion, doubtless, but in earnestness and singleness of purpose, she gave herself to Him to be kept from her besetting sins; promising, in His strength, to "cut un off," now and for ever, and we are glad to say the promise was faithfully kept.

When her neighbour returned with healing appliances, she listened with heart-felt praises on her own lips to the song of praise that was being raised, and joined in words that to her had long been sweetly familiar:

"My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine;
For Thee all the pleasures of sin I resign;
My gracious Redeemer, my Saviour art Thou;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus 'tis now."

[99]

"OUT OF THE WAY."

"THAT was a fine sermon, Herbert! A masterpiece of eloquence and forceful teaching combined," said Mrs. Green to her husband, as they walked home one Sunday morning after service.

A look of pain crossed the good deacon's face, and he answered:

"I have news which will surprise you, Mary. My own suspicion and that of my brother deacons has been fully confirmed this morning."

"What suspicion," asked Mrs. Green quickly.

"That our pastor has for some time past given way to the allurements of strong drink."

"Oh, that is too dreadful! it cannot be true; so good, devoted, and holy a man as I have always thought him to be!"

[100] "It is certainly true. Unfortunately, drink spares none, and the more noble and exalted its victims, the more sure and complete is their downfall. It will seem incredible to you; but the truth is, Mr. Harris preached this morning under the influence of liquor. He had been drinking before he came into the vestry, and was trembling and scarcely able to stand. He said he had been suffering with neuralgia, and asked for a glass of wine to steady his nerves. I said, 'Excuse me, Mr. Harris, it is painfully apparent that you have already indulged too freely in stimulant.' He looked convicted, and covered his face; but presently stammered out something about his excessive intellectual labours compelling him to resort to alcohol. Mr. Shaw then said: 'We would far rather listen to simpler preaching, Mr. Harris, than know that your brilliant discourses are composed and delivered under the stimulus of wine.' He promised to be more careful in the future; but declared that it was quite impossible for him to face the large congregation unless he could gain a little self-command; and truly he was in a pitiable condition. It was close upon service time, and there was no alternative but to give him more wine. To my surprise, immediately afterwards he mounted the pulpit stairs steadily, and conducted the service, as you know, with the utmost propriety. But we are resolved that he must either give up the practice of taking stimulant, or leave the church."

[101] "Oh, Herbert! I'm overwhelmed. Mr. Harris has helped me in my spiritual life as no one else has, and it seems impossible that he could give way to such an awful sin as drunkenness," and Mrs. Green dashed away the tears of sympathy that had fallen, and resolved to hope and pray that her beloved pastor might break from the fatal habit which was making him its victim. But months went by, and Mr. Harris was found to be indulging in still deeper excess, until the story of his downfall was on every lip. Again and again he vowed reformation, and before God and his people humbled himself; but he lacked the needful courage to put the poisonous cup entirely away. "I must take a little, only a little," he said, and that little continually asserted its power to entice and ensnare. Couched in terms of Christian sympathy and forbearance, his dismissal from the flock, over whom for years he had tenderly watched, came at length. He was sitting in his study bending over it in remorse and shame when a knock was heard at his door, and a brother minister entered.

"Just in time to witness my degradation," he exclaimed bitterly. "Look here, Shafton! it has come to this! What will become of my wife and children now?"

The Rev. Ernest Shafton laid his hand upon the shoulder of his brother, perused in silence the official paper before him, and then walked to the window. Deeply cogitating, he stood there for some time, while Mr. Harris's face grew darker, and he muttered, "Turned against me, like every [102] one else! Well, it's my own doing."

"Harris," said Mr. Shafton, suddenly, "do you know what this means for you, my poor fellow?"

"Ruin, I suppose," was the gloomy answer.

"Ay, ruin for time and eternity—having preached to others to become yourself a castaway; but you will not suffer alone, Harris. Your gentle, refined wife will be plunged from comfort to penury; your beautiful, promising children will know the cruel shifts of poverty; will hear their father's name uttered in accents of contempt by a scoffing world; will watch his downward career with fear and loathing, and yet, oh! mark my words, will probably follow in his footsteps, drag out miserable existences, and eventually fill drunkards' graves."

"God forbid! God forbid! anything but that," exclaimed the startled minister, rising in great agitation and pacing the room.

"God does forbid; but you Harris, are paving your children's road to ruin. Come, I have a proposal to make. By God's help, I will save you if you will let me."

"Do what you will, I am ready to submit to anything," groaned the trembling man.

"I will use all my influence to change this dismissal into a long suspension of duties. Meanwhile, you shall leave your home and come and stay with me, and I will stand beside you while you fight in God's strength against your foe; but, my brother, you must pledge yourself to [103] abstain from all intoxicants, now and for ever. Say, are you resolved, for the sake of your wife and children, and your own eternal happiness, to put the accursed thing beneath your feet?"

There was a solemn pause, and in the silence a woman's step crossed the floor, and gentle hands twined round the erring man's neck.

"Jessie, help me, decide for me now," he cried.

Ernest Shafton repeated his proposal to the wife, asking if she would second his efforts to save her husband, by her willing consent to leave him in the care of his friend for a year, or longer if needful, until his reformation were effected.

"A year, did you say? a lifetime, if necessary," was the instant reply. Stooping to her husband's ear she whispered, "Go, dear Henry, and in God's strength fight and conquer. Let no regretful thought turn towards me, for I shall be content.

"'While thee I see
Living to God, thou art alive to me!'"

"You are an angel, Jessie!" exclaimed the man, holding his wife's hands and falling on his knees. Cries for forgiveness for the past and help for the future broke from him as he knelt, and his prayer was heard and answered. In years that followed he looked back upon that memorable hour as the turning-point in his history, and thanked God for the friendly hand that was reached [104] out to save a brother from the abyss which yawned at his feet. Once again he filled an honoured position as the pastor of a large and influential church. Once again he passed in and out of the houses of the people, the beloved friend and ready helper of rich and poor; but in addition to former labours he became everywhere known as the advocate of Total Abstinence for young and old, and so persistent were his efforts in this direction, that many of the deacons and influential men of his church became rigid adherents of the good cause.

"Sir," said one upon whom all the pastor's arguments had apparently been wasted; "Mr. Harris, why can't you let us non-abstainers alone? Let us go our way, and we will accord you the same liberty of action."

Mr. Harris's brow clouded with some painful recollection, and he said with much feeling: "You compel me to refer to the past. Allow me very tenderly, but faithfully to remind you that you did not accord me 'liberty of action' in times gone by."

"What do you mean?" inquired the astonished deacon.

"Forgive me for seeming to be ungrateful for the kindness which alone prompted you; but, oh, my dear friend, remember how in years, that, thank God, are past, you and your brother deacons, equally hospitable and kind-hearted, never allowed me to decline your offer of wine or spirits. If I [105] paid you a call before preaching, you insisted that I needed to be stimulated for my work, and pressed me to accept the best wine your cellars could supply. If I dropped in on my way home, I was sure to be looking white and exhausted, and must therefore take 'just one glass' to restore my energies. Heat and cold, rain and sunshine, joy and sorrow, all afforded you an excuse for compelling me to partake of the fatal cup. Your wines found their way to my table in abundance. Many a time I sought to refuse your false kindness; but you know how deeply I should have grieved you if I had not accepted your hospitality. From the day I first entered upon my pastorate as a moderate drinker, I felt that it was considered a personal slight if I visited any house and refused the proffered wine. Can you wonder that I grew to feel it a necessity? that presently I stumbled and fell, and for a time was 'out of the way through strong drink'? Oh, my brother, let me beg, that, if you cannot banish intoxicants from your home, you will at least refrain from pressing them upon others, lest you cause a weaker brother to offend."

Deeply agitated, the deacon wrung his pastor's hand, abruptly leaving him with the broken words: "Forgive me—I—didn't mean—didn't know—you've won me over at last."

"What is the matter, my dear?" asked Mrs. Green in alarmed tones, as a few minutes later her [106] husband entered the room where she was working, and throwing himself into a chair, buried his face in his hands. The deacon only groaned. "Surely there is nothing wrong with our minister

again," said his wife, knowing that her husband had recently been in the company of Mr. Harris.

"No, no, and if so, I, and such as I, would have been to blame, as we were years ago, God forgive us!" Mrs. Green looked at her husband, half-believing that under some sudden strain his mind had lost its balance.

"What do you mean? It was Mr. Harris's own fault that he gave way to drink, and you should remember that you and his other deacons were faithful in your constant warnings and long-suffering with him beyond what might have been expected."

"We, and only we, caused his downfall, and then reproached him for the disgrace he had brought upon our church," gloomily responded the deacon.

"You are speaking in enigmas; do explain yourself, Herbert," impatiently urged his wife.

In answer, Mr. Green repeated the words of his pastor, which had made so deep an impression upon his own mind. When he had finished he looked up to find that his wife's tears were dropping upon the work which had fallen from her hands.

"Oh, how guilty we have been, Herbert! Well do I remember how persistent I always was in my offers of stimulant to our minister in years gone by, and when he declined I pretended to be hurt, [107] and said he must not refuse anything a lady offered, for she would be sure to know what was good for her guest; and then when I conquered, and he reluctantly took the glass from my hands, I felt so exultant, and all the while I was luring him on to the ruin, which might have been eternal."

Mrs. Green broke down utterly, and there was a suspicious huskiness in her husband's voice as he spoke: "Yes, we are indeed guilty, and we may have been no less so in many other instances. Verily, the blood of souls is on our garments. Mary, what shall we do?"

"Can you ask, Herbert? I don't mind how inhospitable it may appear; but I am resolved never again to offer stimulants to our guests, lest I make the same fatal mistake."

"That is well said, my dear; but—but—shall we agree to refrain from offering intoxicants to callers, and the visitors who occasionally sit at our table, lest we place temptation in their way, while every day those dearer than our life sit and partake with us of the cup which I now believe to possess such fatal allurements? If we have decided no longer to tempt our guests, shall we continue to tempt our innocent children, to whom we stand in their early years as their sole medium of light and knowledge? Think, Mary, if a few years hence one of our boys could [108] truthfully say to us what our pastor has just said."

"Don't say any more; I can't bear it, Herbert."

For a few moments there was silence. Then Mrs. Green spoke again: "There is only one step to be taken; from this day all intoxicants must be banished from our home. Neither our children nor our friends must ever have further opportunity of stumbling over our well-meaning but cruel kindness. God, who knows how blindly and ignorantly we have sinned in the past, will surely grant His forgiving mercy to us, and help us in the future to wage successful battle against this subtle foe who has had, till now, his acknowledged place in our house."

"Thank God for that decision; my heart already feels lighter. From this time I will take my stand beside Mr. Harris in his noble Temperance work, and so far as I can, help to repair the wrong we have done him. May God speed our efforts!"

"Amen!" reverently whispered Mrs. Green.

[109]

TIM MALONEY'S PIG.

CH, thin, mate, an' yer don't appair to be takin' kindly to yer wark the morn! Shure, an' I'm rale 'shamed uv ye, afther yer day's plasurin'," remarked Tim Maloney, a broad-shouldered, good-

"  tempered looking Irishman, to his fellow-workman, who, with sundry grunts and ejaculations expressive of discontent with the world in general, and his own hard-working existence in particular, had just lazily emptied his hod of bricks at the feet of Tim, who was briskly disposing of them, with many dexterous pats and turns of his trowel, as he laid them, one by one, upon the wall he was engaged in building. It was early in the morning of the day following a public holiday; and, of all the workmen employed upon the block of houses in course of erection, only Tim Maloney and John Jarvis had made their appearance, the latter of whom seemed none the better for the previous day's cessation from toil. [110]

He answered gloomily:

"All very well for the likes of you, Tim Maloney, to be chaffin' a feller; but I'd like to know if you'd feel fit to kill yerself with work if you'd been draggin' about the day afore with the missis a scoldin', and half a dozen brats at yer heels as gave yer no peace, a spendin' of yer hard-earned money, and seein' nought for it."

Tim picked up a brick, and placed it tenderly in the mortar bed he had just prepared, then said:

"An' isn't it bacomin' that the wife uv yer bossum and the childer should share yer holiday, an' hilp yer to spind yer money, me bhoy?"

"I can't say as it isn't," frankly replied John; "but some wives is different to others; and mine just nags and worrits and gives a feller no peace of his life, and the children takes after her."

"Shure, an' what does she nag and worrit ye about thin?" asked Tim, with a twinkle in his eye; but at that moment John shouldered his empty hod and disappeared.

"The ould sthory, shure an' certin," muttered Tim, and in his honest, kindly heart, for the hundredth time, revolved many a scheme for helping and stimulating his fellow-workman to a better life.

The breakfast bell presently rang, and John Jarvis, who lived at a little distance, threw himself at full length upon some boards, grumbling at his wife for being late with his breakfast. [111]

"Maybe she's wearied herself wid followin' ye an' yer half dozen brats yester," dryly suggested Tim, as he threw down his trowel and strode away to his cottage home close by, where a plentiful meal awaited him. Certainly, when he met Mrs. Jarvis the next minute, she looked sufficiently white and fagged to justify his suggestion.

"Mornin' to ye," he said, nodding and hurrying by.

But Tim's cottage lay in Mrs. Jarvis's homeward way, and as her lagging footsteps passed the door, the buxom form of Tim's wife appeared.

"Come in, an' rist ye a spell, Mrs. Jarvis; ye look more fit for yer bed nor to be draggin' about at all, at all."

"It's just what I am. I'm sure I don't know what's coming to me," exclaimed Mrs. Jarvis, as she dropped into a chair.

"Give her a dhrop uv tay, Peggy, an' she'll ravive a bit," said Tim.

"You're very kind, Tim. Why, this tea is real good, as good as what the gentry drinks. I feel quite a different creature after it, I declare;" and Mrs. Jarvis presently set down her empty cup with a surprised air.

"I can't think how you manage, Mrs. Maloney. Here's your husband earning the same wages as mine, yet you can afford to live a sight better than us; you're better dressed too, and what a fine [112] place you've got; and isn't that pig in the garden yours?"

Mrs. Jarvis's eyes had roamed from the bright, clean kitchen, through the open window to the well-stocked garden, where, in a corner, stood a sty, the occupant of which was rooting and grunting in the manner peculiar to his kind.

"Indade, an' ye're rayte; a fine porker he is too. I'll sind ye up a bit whin we kill, an' ye shall tasthe for yerself."

"Thank you kindly, Tim. It's not often we can afford to indulge in a bit of bacon now. Times are so hard, you see," returned Mrs. Jarvis, with a look of still deeper perplexity upon her face as she rose to go.

Tim whispered to his wife who nodded, and then turned to Mrs. Jarvis, saying:

"Now, don't ye be thrudgin' up wid yer husban's bit uv dinner. My Tim'll bring him home, an' he's kindly wilcome to the bist of our purvidin'."

Mrs. Jarvis was certainly weak and unnerved, for she fell back into her seat and began to sob.

"Whist, now, did ye think we mane to pisin yer good man?" said Tim, cheerily.

"No, no, indeed; but I don't know what to make of such kindness. It's nothing but cross words and scowling looks I ever get."

Tim sat down with a determined air.

"Jist dhry yer eyes, me dear, and listhen to me; bekase I mane it all for yer good, and Jack's too, poor bhoy!" [113]

Tim continued: "Ye're both uv ye makin' a therrible big misthake that'll ruin ye in time an' etarnity. Here's Jack, a sheer lump uv misary, wid no heart for wark nor play, an' here's yerself a frettin' an' a pinin' yer life away; an' yer poor childer's like to thread in yer stheps. An' here's mesilf an' me wife, no betther an' no wurse off in the matther uv brass nor ye, as happy an' comforthable as ye'd wish, an' all bekase uv that same big misthake ye're makin'."

"What do you mean, Tim?" inquired Mrs. Jarvis, wiping her eyes.

"Jack 'ud know what I mane, for he's had the lingth uv me tongue many's the time on that same subjact; but I'll till ye, an' maybe ye'll lay it to heart betther nor he. Mrs. Jarvis, if ye'll belave me, it's the dhrink that's at the botthom uv yer misary."

"I won't hear you say such dreadful things, Tim. My Jack's no drinker, nor me neither. We're both of us moderate, and never—never—" but here Mrs. Jarvis faltered; and, eyeing her steadily, Tim went on:

"Ye niver, niver take a dhrop too much 'cept on holiday times, an' sich like; an' thin, what wid the boddher uv the childer, an' the sayte seein', an' the heat, maybe ye git a little overcome wid what ye take to quanch yer thirst."

"I dare say you're right, Tim," said Mrs. Jarvis, very much ashamed; "but I mean to say that my Jack and me don't do what some folks do in the way of drinking. He doesn't spend his evenings in the public, except now and then; and, as for me, I only take what will keep body and soul together, though I confess you're pretty near the truth as to taking more than is good on holidays." [114]

"Well, we won't say anythin' about sich times. But supposin' it's to-day, ye'll kape about till the childer's home from school, an' the first thing'll be: 'Here, Sammie, fetch me a pint of bitther,'—it's bitther, I suppose?"

"Yes, I can't drink swill, there's no strength in it," said Mrs. Jarvis.

"Then you'll feel spry for a bit; but it don't last, an' ye want to sit down an' take a nap afore the fire; an' whin ye git up ye feel out uv sorts, an' the babby's a burdhen, an' yer toddlin' Jim's a plague; an' by the time that afthernoon school's done ye want windin' up agin, an' ye must have half a pint afore ye touch yer tay; an' whin Jack fetches the supper beer, ye're more than riddy to take yer share. Thin ye slape heavy like, an' if the babby wants seein' to ye can scarce wake; an' ye don't know how to dhrag yersilf up in the mornin', an' ye wish ye'd got a dhrink uv beer handy to give ye a sthart, on'y ye haven't the face to sind for it afore breakfast; but, ye may belave me, ye'll do that wan uv these days; an' the more ye take uv the pisenin' stuff, the more ye'll want, an' the wurse ye'll feel, for there's no strength an' no good in it at all, at all. It jist gives ye a little spurt for the time, but it's over in a jiffy, an' ye're cross an' fretful wid iverythin' an' iverybody, an' life's a burdhen from morn till night. An' it's jist the same wid Jack, poor bhoy. An' thin, whin ye might git a few hours of plasure, ye're in an' out uv the public-houses till ye're fair fuddled; an' the nixt day ye've both sore heads and sour tempers, an' yer money's gone inter the bargain." [115]

"Do you really think there's no good in the beer, Tim? It does seem to put new life into one; and I hanker after it when I'm weakly."

"Uv coorse, that's nateral, whin ye feel sthronger an' betther afther a glass; but I've sthudied the quastion, an' wiser heads nor mine'll tell ye jist as I do,—that it takes out uv a bodhy more nor it iver puts in. It gives ye for a space what ye want; but ye have to pay for it at an awful rate uv intherest."

Mrs. Jarvis looked frightened; but Tim proceeded in still graver tones:

"It's the mortal thruth as I'm tellin' ye, indade an' indade; for ye have to pay for ivery bit uv go that yer glass uv bitther gives ye wid yer ha'pence first, uv coorse, an' afther wid loss uv yer good timper, an' the time ye spind in pullin' yersilf togither agin. Ye have to pay wid a wakely bodhy and a heavy heart; so the childer's sint out uv yer sayte to git inter mischif an' sin; and yer husban' niver sees yer face wid a smile on it, an' niver hears ye spake a kindly word. An' sooner nor later ye'll find ye'll have to pay for yer bitther wid the loss uv husban' an' childer; for, ye may belave me, the time'll come, bad cess to ye, whin Jack'll spind ivery blissid night at the public, an' yer childer will make ye sup sorra be rasin uv turnin' to bad ways; for there's no worritin' wives at the public, an' no grumblin' mothers round the sthreet corners. An' that's the last worrud I can say, for the bell'll ring afore another minit." [116]

With a nod to his wife, and a kindly "good mornin'" to Mrs. Jarvis, Tim hastened away.

"My missis says I'm to fitch ye home to dinner wid me, Jack, an' she's tould yer wife that same; so come along wid ye, for ye'll git nought but air for all ye're growlin' if ye stay there," were the words that fell on John Jarvis's astonished ears, as he lay watching his companion get into his coat at the dinner hour.

"Well, I never, if that don't beat all," he exclaimed, jumping up and seizing his own coat. "What's put that into her head?"

"Case yer quastions an' look sharp now, for I want ye to have a look round me bit uv ground

afther dinner," good-humouredly replied Tim.

The meal to which John presently sat down was simple enough but abundant, and such as he seldom partook of at his own table. He could not help also contrasting the bright, happy faces of Tim's wife and children with his own. He became silent and absorbed in thought, as he walked round Tim's garden when the repast was ended. [117]

"Ye're an' illigant slip uv a pig, an'll make good mate to ralish the bread an' praties nixt winter, shure now, won't ye?" said Tim, addressing himself to the bristly porker who grunted his approval of his master's hand, as the two men leaned over the sty.

"I'd advase ye to kape a pig, Jack; ye've no idaya how handy a bit uv bacon is through the winter, wid so many mouths to be fadin'."

"You might just as well advise me to set up a carriage and pair," answered John, somewhat testily.

"Nonsinse, ye might do it jist as aisy as mesilf."

"I'd like to know how you make that out, when I never have a penny to bless myself with after I've paid up on Saturday nights."

"Jist tell me how much ye an' yer ould woman spind a week in beer," was the unexpected reply.

"At yer old game, matey, eh; well, really now, I can't say. Perhaps I take three pints a day; not much for a working man, Tim."

"An' maybe yer wife wad take a pint an' a half uv bitther, that wad make sixpence a day for yersilf, an' fourpence ha'pinny for hersilf; an' ye know ye ofthen spind more nor that. That 'ud make six shillin' an' a pinny three farthin's a wake; wan poun' six shillin' an' eight pince a month; an' sixteen poun' a year. How many pigs de ye sind down yer throats at that rate in the coorse uv twelve months, me bhoy?" [118]

John Jarvis stood open-eyed and open-mouthed.

"Sixteen pound a year! What on earth have I been a doin'? Sixteen pound a year; who'd have thought it!" he ejaculated presently; and no more could Tim get out of him, till, late in the afternoon of that day, he emptied a hod of bricks at Tim's feet with such energy that Tim looked up astonished.

"I've made up my mind, Tim, to have a pig. I've been a fool, and thank'ee for as good as tellin' of me;" and then, as if afraid to trust himself to say more, he turned away to his work.

That night he and his wife, in the course of a long conversation, not necessary to record here, made certain resolves; two of which were never to spend any money in beer, and to try and do their duty better to each other and their children than they ever had done.

In future years they never ceased to be thankful for the promises then made, which, being faithfully kept, bore fruit in a happy home, and the envied worldly prosperity which was their neighbour's.

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[119]

THE MOTHER'S MISTAKE.

HALF a dozen little children brimful of life and frolic, a delicate wailing infant, an indolent maid of all work, and a careworn anxious mother, wearied with sleepless nights and the burden of domestic cares!

"Poor thing! no wonder you look exhausted!" said a friend who had called, and was listening with a sympathetic ear to the story of a woman's fretting cares and heavy responsibilities.

"I wouldn't mind if only my health were vigorous, and I had physical strength to face life bravely," sighed Mrs. Stewart in reply.

"Do let me beg you to take all the care of yourself that you can. You must think not only of the present, but of the future, for these little ones who need such unceasing toil now will want your loving thought and oversight for many years to come; and for their sake, and your husband's, it is your bounden duty to stimulate your flagging energies and strengthen your system to meet the constant demand upon it," was the response. [120]

"How can I?" despairingly asked Mrs. Stewart; "you see baby, poor little fellow, fills my arms night and day, and seldom gives me a chance of taking proper rest."

"I know of only one way in which, overtaxed as you are, you can prevent yourself from breaking down under such pressure, and that is, by taking stimulants in one form or another. When you feel nervous and depressed, don't hesitate to take a glass of wine, and before commencing your dinner and supper take a little malt liquor to give you an appetite, for after attending to the children's wants I am sure you must feel disinclined to eat anything yourself."

"Yes, I am often unable to eat a mouthful of solid food; but thanks for your advice; I will try what a little stimulant will do for me."

So Mrs. Stewart commenced the daily use of alcoholic stimulants, and finding their effects to be beneficial to body and mind, and knowing little or nothing of the subtle danger that lurked in the poisoned cup, each domestic emergency that arose was ere long met in the fictitious strength afforded by the ready stimulant.

Years passed away, and the children, whose ceaseless demands upon their mother's patience and love had well-nigh exhausted her strength, grew into girlhood and boyhood. [121]

One morning the family was seated at the breakfast table when the servant brought in a letter enclosing a bill with the familiar signature of a well-known firm of brewers. The husband's brows knitted as he glanced down the items.

"It seems to me, Eliza, that we use too much ale and wine for a private family. Why, we consume more and more, and I only take the same quantity that I did years ago. It's more than I can stand!" he said, looking across at his wife, who was listlessly sitting at the head of the table with her coffee untasted before her. She answered sharply:

"I can't help it, John; I shouldn't take it if I didn't need it, and you might know that nothing else has kept me alive for many a year."

"I don't complain of stimulant in moderation, my dear; but I cannot believe that an extensive use of alcohol can benefit a delicate constitution," replied Mr. Stewart. His wife was not inclined to let the matter drop.

"You seem to forget that the children take their glass of ale too, and that makes some difference in the amount we use."

"Well, I object to strong, healthy boys and girls touching stimulants; it is expensive and quite unneedful." [122]

"But, papa, we like it so much; you mustn't stop our supplies," cried several youthful voices.

"I must, and I will, my dears; you have not your mother's plea of ill-health to urge, and from this time I shall not expect you to take alcohol as a daily beverage. I have no objection to lemonade or some other non-intoxicant taking its place, for that will be much less expensive, and besides, I have lately come to the conclusion that young people, at least, are likely to be harmed by the stimulus of ale or wine."

"You are very absurd, John. What harm could come to our boys and girls by taking half a glass of ale at dinner and sometimes at supper?" testily asked Mrs. Stewart.

"Why, Eliza, you know that a taste formed in childhood is held with greater tenacity than any other, and this taste for stimulant, which I am sorry to see the children possess, may not always permit them to remain satisfied with a glass or so daily; for, I was reading not long ago, that the tendency of alcohol is to create a morbid craving which may become that insatiable thirst for drink which has ruined thousands of men and women who were once children as promising as those who sit round our table. I wish I had been as wise years ago; they should never have known the taste of it." So saying, Mr. Stewart left the table.

A chorus of voices was raised as the door closed. [123]

"It's too bad!" "A great shame!" "Lemonade, indeed!" and other exclamations were uttered expressing disapproval of the father's action. Mrs. Stewart had not been careful of late years to uphold her husband's authority in the household, and the unfilial remarks passed without rebuke, she merely adding: "You'll have to mind what your father says, you know, or we shall all get into trouble."

A few hours after, when the elder children were at school, the youngest, a bright boy of seven, came to her side and said: "Shall I get your wine, mamma?"

"You are mamma's dear boy to remember her lunch time. Yes, bring it out, though it is quite early."

The wine was brought, and one glass, and then another, and yet another was drained; the little fellow meanwhile standing by. Catching sight of his wistful looks, the mother said: "Come, and have a sip, Bertie."

"Papa says I mustn't," faltered Bertie, but drawing a step nearer. Lost to all sense of duty to husband or child, Mrs. Stewart answered:

"Come, and drink, I tell you; didn't your father say you were not to have any at dinner, and this is lunch?"

She poured out a full glass, which the child drank without further demur. He was shortly asleep on the sofa, waking at dinner-time in fretful mood, and turning impatiently from his food.

"I want my ale," he cried. [124]

"You mustn't have it, Bertie," said his eldest sister; "we all have to do without it now, thanks to papa's whimsical notions."

"Wait till you're a man, Bertie, and you can drink as much as you please, as I mean to," remarked his fourteen-year-old brother with a contracted brow, and a longing glance towards his mother's glass; while she, poor deluded woman, looked on, languidly smiling, with never a thought of the possible future of these children for whom she had suffered and toiled. Many a time, when scarcely conscious of her own actions, did she encourage them to partake with her in secret of that which was banished from the table. It was only by the awful but timely discovery of their mother's degradation that the children were prevented from following in her steps.

A few months later, upon entering the house at the close of the day, the father was met by his eldest daughter, a girl of seventeen, who, with dismay on her face, exclaimed: "Oh, papa, do come upstairs, and see what is the matter with poor mamma. She has been sleeping heavily for hours, and when I have tried to disturb her, she has spoken quite wildly, and then gone to sleep again. A dreadful thought has just occurred to me that perhaps she has taken poison." Mr. Stewart anxiously followed his daughter to the room where his wife was lying on the bed. He bent over her. Her unnatural appearance, and the strong smell of liquor which proceeded from her parted lips, told the tale; and the truth, horrible and ghastly, stood revealed to the husband. [125]

"Papa, tell me the truth; is it poison?" asked his daughter, as Mr. Stewart staggered to a seat. He hesitated a moment, then hoarsely said:

"It is poison of the worst kind, my poor child! Your mother is intoxicated. Oh, what shall we do? How can we save her?" One brief moment of horror, and then, subduing all outward manifestation of her agony, the girl said:

"Papa, we must put the temptation out of her way. We must all of us do without a luxury which has brought about such a terrible result."

So from the house there was banished from that time the alcoholic beverages which had been deemed necessary; but, alas! too late to save the wife and mother from rapidly drifting into confirmed habits of drunkenness. All the schemes that love could devise proved powerless to prevent the mistaken woman from continued indulgence in the fatal cup.

The apparent need for constant recourse to stimulants had long since passed away, but the habit of past years had wrought deadly mischief, not alone in gradually weakening the power of self-control, but in creating that morbid craving for alcohol which leaves its deluded victim no alternative but to obey its behests. She had seen no harm in what had become an essential of life to her, until she found herself bound in its toils. True, she did not yield to its slavery without [126] many a struggle, but temptation was overpowering, and finally she succumbed to what she declared was inevitable. She had forgotten the only remedy available in such need as hers. No cry from her despairing heart had risen to heaven; the strength she lacked had not been sought from Him Who only can save from the thraldom of sin, and so, with the stain of uncancelled guilt upon her conscience, she hastened to an untimely end.

As she lay dying with mind weakened by long excess, they sought in vain for some sign of penitence, for some words to assure their sad hearts that the darkness of approaching dissolution was gilded by hues of hope and trust in the forgiving mercy of God through Christ. Day after day the sufferer's lips were sealed in an obstinate silence that struck dismay into the hearts of the watchers. She was dying without hope it seemed; but the prayer of faithful friends rose that the intercession of the Great High Priest might be made, and prove effectual for His wandering child.

Still the shadows deepened until it became evident that the mother's hours were numbered.

"I will watch beside her now, my dears," said the husband, dismissing his children for a brief period. Taking his seat beside the motionless form, he sent up a petition for help. Then, stooping over his wife, he said: "Eliza, dear, would you not like me to pray for you?" [127]

The dying woman opened her eyes and faintly whispered: "No."

"Shall I send for a minister to come and pray with you, then, dear?"

Mrs. Stewart roused herself with a great effort, and with energy exclaimed: "No, *He has prayed for me*, and that is enough." They were her last words. Before the next morning she had passed away, leaving to husband and children the faint comfort of her dying testimony: "He has prayed for me."

Say, gentle reader, whether being assured of the thousand parallel cases which exist in this civilised land of ours, you will dare to place temptation in the way of your sister, by advocating the use of alcohol as the necessary stimulant which alone can nerve the failing heart and brain to meet the exigencies of her daily life, thus placing before her unwary feet the stumbling-block over which she may fall never to rise? It may be that you who proffer the well-meaning advice are

moderate in the use of your own alcoholic luxuries, and cannot understand the mysterious attraction they may hold for another; yet, surely to you is uttered the divine warning: "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him." And you, sister, plying your household tasks with an aching head, amidst the ceaseless prattle of the little ones who call you mother, striving patiently to perform your God-given duties, yet fainting under the burden and heat of the day, beware, oh, beware, of seeking relief from the tension of nerve and brain, which [128] is a woman's allotted portion, by deadening the finely strung susceptibilities of your nature by indulgence in any of the various forms which alcohol assumes, or under which it would hide. Beware how you seek its false stimulus to enable you to cope with the almost superhuman duties devolving upon you! Patience and strength to endure will be given in God's appointed way; but be assured you will never find it in that which is responsible for myriads of ruined homes and blighted lives.

[129]

THE CHILDREN'S SUPPER.

"SHE'S such a little thing, papa; really it seems quite unnecessary to say anything about it to her for the next few years."

"Perhaps you are right, dear. Elsie will meet with no temptation at home, and a child of her tender years is scarcely likely to find it outside."

So said Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, when it had been proposed to introduce the subject of total abstinence to their youngest, a fairy child of six, and suggest to her that she should follow the example of her parents and brothers and sisters, who shortly before had pledged themselves to abstain from the use of intoxicating beverages.

"If we say anything to the dear child, it would be necessary to tell her why we consider it advisable to banish wine and ale from the house, and she would be perplexed and saddened by the insight afforded into misery and degradation of which she, at present, knows nothing. Her life [130] is all sunshine now, and we have no right to disturb her childish happiness," added Mrs. Morgan.

So Elsie's little mind puzzled over the unrevealed reason of the absence from her father's table of the bottled ales and sparkling wines, the taste of which she had already learned to like.

A year passed away, and an invitation to a children's party was sent to Elsie, who forthwith became wild with excitement. A dainty creature she looked on the afternoon of the important day. Her golden curls softly floated over her blue merino dress, and her brown eyes flashed and glowed with delight.

"Mother's darling, good-bye! try and be a little lady, and nurse shall fetch you at nine o'clock," said the mother, as she pressed her child's coral lips, and then watched the little feet trip down the road beside the servant.

The hours, brimful of frolic and merriment, passed all too quickly for the happy children, and at eight o'clock they gathered in the dining-room for the early supper. The long table was covered with luxuries, and beside each child's plate was a small glass of wine.

"Now, dear children, make yourselves quite at home, and ask for anything you want," said the hostess, as her little guests took their places.

"May I have a glass of water, please?" asked an eight-year-old boy, soon after supper had [131] commenced, pushing his glass of wine aside.

"Oh, my dear Charlie, I am sure you will like a glass of wine much better. Gentlemen always take wine, you know," replied the lady.

"I mus'n't take wine, please, because I belong to the Young Abstainers' Union," replied Charlie.

"Why, whatever kind of a Union is that, my boy?" asked the host.

"It means that those who join it have promised never to touch wine or anything of the kind."

"Stuff and nonsense! You'll never be a man unless you can drink a glass of wine with your friends."

Charlie coloured, but pushed his glass further away.

"Never mind, dear! our little friend's whims must not be interfered with. He will learn better when he is older," said the hostess, ordering a glass of water to take the place of the wine.

Elsie sat next to Charlie, and turning to her the host said:

"Now, Miss Elsie, you don't look as if you belonged to this army of youthful abstainers. Let us see how you can drink your wine; then you shall have the glass that Charlie despises."

Nothing loth, Elsie obeyed. She had never been allowed more than a sip or two from her father's glass, and it was many months since even that quantity had passed her lips. What wonder, then, that when supper was ended, and she tried to leave her seat, she should stumble and fall to the ground, overcome by her unwonted indulgence in the stimulant. [132]

"Poor little Elsie! let me help you up," cried Charlie; but Elsie lay at his feet, and kicked and screamed in unaccountable anger. When at last she was picked up, her cheeks were purple with passion, and her eyes gleamed with a strange, wild light.

"The excitement has been too much for her, I suppose; but I am quite surprised at such a display of temper. She has always seemed so sweet and gentle," and the hostess hurried Elsie away to the waiting nurse.

"Miss Elsie, Miss Elsie, I am ashamed of you; whatever will your ma say?" expostulated the servant, as Elsie clung to her skirts and refused to say good-night.

"Papa, what is the matter with the child! I never saw her look so strange," exclaimed Mrs. Morgan, taking Elsie a few minutes later from her nurse's arms.

Mr. Morgan sat the child on his knee, and as he did so the fumes of wine met him.

"She has taken more wine than has been good for her; that is what is the matter with our little one!"

The horrified mother sank into a chair, but Elsie raised her dimpled hand and struck at her father, crying in a hoarse unnatural voice: [133]

"I haven't, I haven't, you nasty papa! I didn't have half enough of the nice wine."

"That is quite sufficient; take her away, nurse, and put her to bed. I will talk to her to-morrow."

"We have made a great mistake, wife, and are reaping the consequences in seeing our six-year-old child inflamed with the stimulant which we have banished from our own home," said the father, as the door closed.

Mrs. Morgan wept, and made no reply.

Long and seriously did the parents talk to Elsie on the following day, who, easily influenced, as what child of her tender years might not be, listened with tears to the revelation of unknown dangers, and pleaded that she, like Charlie, might make such a promise as would save her childish feet from again being ensnared by the betrayer, and in the following years prove her safeguard and defence.

Mothers, who read this true story, will you not beware of the danger that threatens your little children, and learn that none are too young and fair to escape the toils of strong drink, unless guarded by an intelligent knowledge of the perils that beset them, and a resolve, early formed, never to touch or handle the treacherous cup?

[134]

ROLAND WEST'S MARK,

AND HOW HE MADE IT.

"TELL nurse to bring the children down, Barnes," said Mrs. West, as a servant answered a peal of the dining-room bell.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Barnes, and in a few minutes the children made their appearance. After being introduced to a guest, the elder ones seated themselves at the table, from which the dessert was not yet removed.

"Please, mamma, may I have half a glass of sherry?" asked one.

"I should like port better," said a second.

"Will you help them, very carefully, please, papa?" asked the mother.

"I want some, too," said a bright, handsome boy of five, upraising his sparkling eyes to his father's face. [135]

"Oh, no, Roland, you are such a wee boy; if you have it, Leonard will want it."

"I do like it so much; let me have just a little drop in papa's glass," teased Roland.

"Oh, come, mamma; that'll never hurt him; only help to make a man of him, won't it, Roland?" said his father.

"Yes, make me a man, like my papa! When I'm big, I'll drink, oh, bottles and bottles; not have a taste of papa's," said the child, looking contemptuously at the remains of the sparkling wine, which, in his father's glass, had been set before him.

"When you're a man, Roland, you will be a little wiser than you are now," said his father, somewhat sharply.

"I'll be as wise as—as—that man in the picture on the library wall, perhaps."

"Who's that?" asked the guest, in amused tones.

"Why, Gladstone! The precocious youngster strongly admires him, and is for ever declaring his intention of copying his hero's plan of life."

"He has the brow and eye of a genius, West!" said the visitor, gazing in admiration at the boy's face. "I wish I had such a child! What are you going to make of him?"

"I'll give him a good education, first; fit him for the bar, if he takes kindly to the idea, and he ought, for he talks like a lawyer already. Yes, he'll make his mark, I shouldn't wonder," replied [136] the father, with pride; "but what's the matter with the boy? sleepy! at this time! Here, sit up! Mamma, his forehead's burning. Lucy, has he had a fall upstairs?"

"No, papa: but he was asleep when Barnes came for us, and nurse had to wake him up to come down."

Mr. and Mrs. West looked anxiously at the child, who was already asleep, and after observing his flushed cheeks and heavy breathing, Mrs. West sent for the nurse.

"Nurse," she said, as the servant entered the room, "have you noticed Master Roland seeming unwell to-day?"

"No, ma'am, he was as bright as usual this morning; but, when we were at dinner, I happened to turn my head to attend to Miss Hetty, and Master Roland emptied my glass of ale, and since then he has been very drowsy, and I could scarcely rouse him to bring him downstairs."

"Oh, nurse, I wish you would take your ale some other time; if the children see you taking it they are sure to want it, and I never allow them to touch anything but a little wine," exclaimed Mrs. West.

"Roland won't come to any harm, my dear, so don't trouble yourself. Carry him away, nurse, and put him straight to bed. He'll be all right in the morning," said Mr. West. [137]

Nurse obeyed, looking much aggrieved. Bending over the sleeping child she murmured: "What with my ale and his father's drops, the boy's drunk. Poor little fellow! he'll make his mark, as they're so fond of saying, but I'm afraid it will be a very black one. But I'll take no more blame to myself, for Master Roland shall never see me touch my ale again; not for missis's sake, though," added the girl with a dark look.

Ten years went by, and again Mr. West entertained the same friend at his well-spread table.

"What has become of that fine little fellow of yours, West? Roland, I think you called him," inquired the guest, looking round the table and missing from amongst the youthful faces the one that had struck his fancy years ago.

"The young scamp's just finishing his schooldays," answered the father.

"He's been making his mark, I quite expect; no one could help observing the boy had splendid capabilities. Do you still think of making a lawyer of him?" continued the visitor.

"I don't know what to do with him; I'm fairly puzzled. It's true enough, as you say, he has splendid capabilities, and might become anything he chose; but he settles to nothing, and as for

making his mark at school, he's done it with a vengeance." [138]

Mrs. West frowned from the bottom of the table, but Mr. West took no notice, and continued:

"His education and his private bills have cost me a pretty penny."

"Private bills! What has a school-boy to do with private bills?" asked the guest.

"Oh, bills for champagne suppers and cigars, on the sly, of course; the young rascal says the other fellows do it, and he must, and I've had to pay the piper. I told him last term he would have to stop his extravagance and settle to hard work, but he seems in no way inclined to do that, and I've had more than one complaint of him from head-quarters."

"Well, papa, Roland's only a boy yet, and we mustn't expect him to be as wise as his father," expostulated Mrs. West, in a tone of irritation.

"No, my dear, we must not and do not, but when I was his age——"

"You were perfect, of course," finished Mrs. West; "pray find some other topic of conversation than the little weaknesses of your son."

"Little weaknesses!" Ah! thus had Roland's grave faults and his early tendencies to evil courses been glossed over by the false kindness of a fond parent, until now, at the early age of sixteen, few would have recognised in the boisterous stripling, with swaggering gait and eyes already lustreless, the once lovely boy, whose childish years had given the fair promise of a golden future. [139]

Choosing for himself companions rife for mischief and folly, on leaving school he indulged in those pursuits, from which, though most congenial, he had been greatly debarred during his seclusion. Now he began, as he termed it, to enjoy life. Each evening he sought the exciting scenes of revelry and debauch, and neither his father's stern reproaches nor the tearful pleadings of his mother, moved him to more than a passing thought of the ruin which he was inevitably working out for himself. But when his constitution had become weakened by excesses, there came into his life influences that were mighty in their gentle drawing towards all that was good and noble.

While yet a young man, he met, at the house of a friend, a lady of strong religious tendencies. Strongly drawn to her by the attraction of a well-balanced mind and a beautiful exterior, he resolved, if possible, to win her affections. So great was her influence upon him, that, for a time, the force of evil habits lost its power, and other society was readily relinquished for hers, and the house of God beheld him an outwardly reverent worshipper at her side. Alas! that one so influenced by the power of human love should have missed those gracious impressions which, made on the tender heart of childhood, so often prove the good seed of the Kingdom, springing up into life eternal.

In thus taking upon himself the profession of Christianity, Roland was no hypocrite. He had [140] seen the beauty and acknowledged the power of a life that was far above him, and from his heart he loathed the life he had hitherto led, and earnestly desired to put it away for ever. But strong only in his own strength, and looking to no higher power than earthly love to aid him in his upward course, what marvel that he deceived himself and others also. With his heart's desire at length accomplished, and with renewed prospects of a bright future, Roland West might have retrieved the dark past, and entered upon a career of usefulness, such as had been fondly pictured for him. Was it so? Let one scene, after a lapse of twelve years, tell its sorrowful tale.

In a cottage in one of the crowded suburbs of London, a pale, anxious-looking mother was alternately sewing and directing the studies of a fine boy, with a massive forehead and intelligent eyes.

"Mother, I've mastered it at last; I'm so glad," he said presently.

"That's right, my son; you are quick, like your father," his mother replied with a sigh.

"My father quick!" said the boy with ill-repressed contempt; "I didn't know that before."

"Hush, Allan, your father was very clever when I first knew him, and could do anything he liked."

"Then why does he leave you to work so hard now, while he lounges about all day? Mother, I [141] must speak; tell me that!" cried the boy impetuously.

"I cannot have you speak of your father like that, Allan; but I will tell you why he cannot now do what he ought. When he was a boy like you he was allowed to choose his own way in everything, and have all that he asked for, and he chose wrong companions and sinful pleasures until he ruined and blighted his own life and others too."

Allan hung his head, and remembered how he had sometimes rebelled against the wise decisions of his much loved mother, and determined that in the future he would add as little as possible to the heavy burden that rested upon her frail shoulders. There was a step outside, and Mrs. West rose hurriedly saying: "Clear your books away, and go to bed, Allan; I must lay supper;" but before Allan had time to obey, his father entered.

Was it possible that in a few short years Roland West should have become the besotted,

degraded-looking man, who flung himself into the one easy-chair the room possessed?

"That boy up yet," he said with a scowl, "at those everlasting books; let him go to work like other boys of his age, and earn his salt."

"That's what I intend him to do as soon as he is fit, Roland," answered his wife in the quiet, firm tone with which she always addressed her husband; usually he outwardly submitted to the [142] controlling power that her voice and eye exerted upon him; but this night he was in no mood to be controlled or reasoned with.

"Hold your tongue, you saucy jade! What right have you to be bringing up my boy to know more than his father, and teaching him your own fine airs and graces. I'll have no more of it. Here, boy, fetch me a pint of ale!"

"Roland," said his wife, "Allan shall not go into that place of cursing and drunkenness; I'll go myself rather."

"Oh," said the man, inwardly quailing before her flashing eyes, "is that it, my high and mighty dame? either you or Allan shall go, then."

Seizing a jug, in a moment his wife had disappeared, returning shortly with her face crimson, and the foaming vessel in her hand.

"Well, madam, you've had your way, now I'll have mine," said her husband, and filling a glass, he called his son downstairs. "Here, Allan," he said, "drain that, or I'll thrash you soundly."

"Father, you forget, I belong to the Band of Hope," said the boy appealingly.

"Drink it, I say," and the infuriated man seized the child's arm.

"Roland, will you blight your boy's life as you have your own?" interposed the mother. Down came the cruel hand on wife and child, and, while a volley of oaths rained from the man's lips, [143] Allan lifted the glass and drained the contents.

"Now, go to bed, and remember that when your father speaks you are to obey. I'll make a man of you yet, you young milksop!"

Sobbing bitterly, Allan crept to his bed, and his anguish found vent in the pitiful question: "What else can I be but a drunkard when my father makes me drink?"

What, indeed, could be the future of the child, who from that time was compelled to fetch, and then partake of his brutal father's cup? What marvel that with early acquired taste for strong drink, he impatiently cast aside the restraint of a tender mother, and followed with rapid footsteps his father to a premature dishonoured end!

Another scene, the closing one, and all that is needful for reproof and warning will have been drawn from the life-history of Roland West.

"He's worse to-day, mum," said the nurse of a workhouse infirmary to a woman closely veiled, who was bending over a bed upon which lay stretched the form of an old man. What a face for any woman to gaze upon, and know that once it had been the joy of her life to mark the light of intellect and the tenderness of devotion sparkling and kindling in the eyes that now only turned in their sunken sockets with dim, vague unrest from side to side. [144]

"Do you know me, Roland?" asked the visitor; but no reply was made, nor sign of any kind given.

"Bless you, no, mum; he doesn't know me as allus feeds him, and hasn't for months. He jest lays there and rolls his eyes about, and cries sometimes like a babby," said the nurse who stood by. "You see, mum," she continued, "it's more often like this with them as drinks, when they can't get at their drops, they jest get lower and lower, and you can't do nothing for them. My old man went off like this one, and he'd been a frightful drinker."

"How do you know when he's worse?" asked Mrs. West, for it was she.

"He won't swaller his food, mum, and you can't get no heat into him; jest feel his hands." Mrs. West took the icy hand into her own, and started at its chill dampness.

"This is no ordinary coldness," she said, with a nurse's quick perception; for many years had passed since, obeying her husband's mandate, she had found occupation for herself, and food for her children, at the bedside of the sick and dying.

"He is dying," she said, touching the clammy forehead; "Oh, Roland, say one word to your wife before you go." As if in answer to her appeal there flashed a gleam of intelligence from the glazing eyes, and with a tremendous effort one word broke from the blue lips with terrible distinctness, and rang through the ward. It was the word "Forgive." Then the eyes grew fixed, [145] and the face slowly settled down into the stillness of death. He who was once the pride of a fond father, and the joy of a doting mother, had made his mark and gone from a workhouse bed to answer before his Creator and Judge for the deeds done in the body.

[146]

HOW A HUSBAND WAS LOST AND FOUND.[B]

"WELL, my girl, this is a spanking place to call our own," said Richard Watson, as he surveyed with pride the two tiny rooms which formed the new home to which he had just brought the woman of his choice. His mother had left them together, after putting the last remaining touches to the place; and they had completed their short tour of investigation, discovering, at each step of their slow progress, some new trace of the thoughtful care that had been bestowed upon the arrangement of the goods and chattels with which the two young people had ventured to set up housekeeping.

Richard was a mason by trade, and although his wages were not high, they had enabled him to [147] save something towards a rainy day, and to furnish the aforesaid rooms.

Jane, his wife, had been a domestic servant in a clergyman's family for many years, and had left, with mutual regrets, when Richard would no longer wait for the fulfilment of her promise to him. There was only one fault that her mistress ever had occasion to find with Jane; and, before her maid left, she very faithfully pointed it out; showing her that continued yielding to her failure would be likely to prove disastrous to her happiness as a wife. Jane listened attentively, and promised to remember the warning, and guard against what she knew to be her greatest besetment. And she fully intended to keep her promise. Richard had been so patient and good, and was so fond of her, that it would, indeed, be a shame if she did not do all in her power to make him happy. So strong was she in her own purpose, that she forgot that the habit which had grown with her years would be too powerful for merely a good resolution to overcome.

But that evening, as they lingered over their meal, there was no suspicion of future trouble. The atmosphere was one of love and calm enjoyment. Would that upon every married life there always rested the warm sunshine of that mutual love and trust with which most young people commence their journey together. Too often the love grows cold, faith in each other is lost, and [148] the only change that comes to many from the sore misery of living divided lives is the darkness of death, and an unknown, unprepared for, eternity.

"O, Richard, I never thought you'd have had everything so nice and ready for me. I quite expected plenty of work for a few days," said Jane.

"'Twasn't likely, my dear, as I'd have brought you to that at first, I'd sooner have paid a woman; but mother, she'd have been quite hurt if I hadn't have let her set to work; and I'm sure not even you would have made the place look prettier and brighter," replied Richard.

"No, you're right, Richard. Dear old soul! It's very likely that I shouldn't have fixed the rooms half so nicely; but I shall do my very best to keep them just as they are for many a day. Missis always said I was careless about my work; but it seems to me as if doing for one's own home must be a very different thing to slaving for any one else."

"I've no fear of you, my dear, none at all," replied Richard; "but I don't want you to be slaving and toiling away all your time. You'll get plenty of that by and bye, like my poor mother."

"I can do all my own work, and perhaps lend her a helping hand, for she'll be sure to miss you; and 'tisn't fair that I should take her son, and not make her some kind of a return."

"Bless you, my girl! I'd thought of that before, but didn't like to say anything to you about it, [149] because some women might have been jealous if their husbands had thought anything about their old mothers, who nursed 'em and brought 'em up. I'm real glad you're not that sort."

"I should think it downright mean to be jealous of my own mother-in-law, so you never need fear for me, my dear," returned Jane.

Thus they chatted on through the evening, the first of many such pleasant times; and for weeks Richard never returned from his daily toil without being gladdened by the sight of a figure in clean print dress standing in the doorway to greet him.

But one evening, although Jane met her husband as usual, there was something about her which puzzled Richard.

"What's the matter with you, missis?" he inquired at length, examining her critically, as she took her seat opposite him at the table and began to pour out his tea.

Jane flushed and hesitated, and finally said: "What eyes you men have! Can't you see?"

"I declare you've never changed your morning gown, and it wasn't extra clean to start with; so said I to myself this morning: 'I suppose Jane's going to have a cleaning day; but there's one comfort, she'll be as neat and clean when I get back as she was the first day she stepped foot in the house.'"

"That's just how it is, Richard. I've had a good hard day's work; and I was so tired, I thought for once it didn't matter about changing my dress, as my hands and face were clean." [150]

"Humph," said Richard. He was evidently not quite of his wife's opinion; and, all that evening, whenever he happened to look across at Jane, he experienced a disagreeable sensation at the unaccustomed sight of a dirty dress, and hair that was anything but smooth.

Richard was certainly very particular; and the next morning, on returning from closing the street door behind him, after listening to his last charge to meet him that evening in her usual spotless attire, Jane uttered the ejaculation: "Fussy!"

At that juncture, her landlady, Mrs. Jones, stepped in, asking for the loan of some kitchen utensil, and Jane, with little work on hand, fell into gossip.

"Yes," she said, in answer to her neighbour's comments on the appearance of the room, "it does look nice. I spent the best part of yesterday over it. My good man is very particular, and so am I, for the matter of that, and I like a clean place to sit in."

"Ah, well, wait till you've a batch of children, like me, and you won't be able to have your regular cleaning times, and get done to sit with your husband of evenings. Not that mine's ever at home, if I had the chance of sitting down a spell," said Mrs. Jones.

"My husband always stays at home, and I should fret if he took to leaving me alone," replied Jane. [151]

"Don't you make too much fuss over him at first, my dear. He'll be spoiled, and always expect you to keep it up. Just you take my advice, Mrs. Watson, and live a little easy the next few months, while you've got the chance. Life'll be hard enough for you, depend upon it; and I'd just save my strength if I was you, for you'll need it all."

With these parting words the woman went away, leaving her suggestions and advice to work as they might in Jane's mind. It was so different to anything her husband's mother had ever said to her on the matter. "Spare no pains," she had said, "during the first year of your married life, to make home the happiest place in all the world for your husband, and you will never regret it."

Hitherto Jane had listened to her words and acted upon them, thereby securing her own and her husband's happiness. Now she sat down, somewhat listlessly, to think over what Mrs. Jones had just said.

"Who's likely to be right, I wonder, mother or Mrs. Jones? 'Tisn't likely that his own mother would think her son could be spoiled; and yet, I don't know but what I'm doing that, and I'm sure I can't keep it up always. I never have an idle moment," mused she; "what with keeping my own place as clean as a new pin, and running round to mother's. I wonder what Mrs. Jones would have said if I'd told her that he didn't like my dirty dress yesterday evening, and scarcely said a word to me, after slaving all day to please him! Men do want a lot from a woman, I must say!" [152]

But just at that point Jane started to her feet, and resolutely put away the new thought which had come upon her quite unawares. But Jane's habit had asserted itself again, and, little by little, she yielded to it; until one day Richard let himself into his home with the latch-key, and, walking into the little kitchen, found an untidy place, and a dirty wife stooping before a fireless grate.

"Come, come, missis, do you know the time?" he said.

"How should I, when the clock's stopped?"

"Why didn't you wind it then, my dear? But don't flurry yourself," he added kindly; "I'll get cleaned, and then maybe tea'll be ready." And passing into the outer kitchen, Richard began to wash away the traces of his day's work. Half ashamed of herself, Jane bustled about, and soon had tea waiting. When Richard came in he glanced at his slatternly-looking wife, and said: "I don't mind waiting while you're making yourself tidy, Jane."

"It doesn't matter, Richard. We're late to-night, and the evening will be gone directly."

"Well, Jane, I don't like my wife to sit down in such a dirty state as you're in. I don't see the need of it, when I can be clean enough."

"Oh, no! I dare say not; you men think we women folk can do the dirtiest work and never soil our fingers and be always ready to dance attendance on you whenever you choose to come home," said Jane, using her perverse woman's tongue as she had never before ventured to do in her husband's presence. [153]

Richard opened his lips to utter a sharp retort, but, being a man of peace, thought better of it;

and, rising from his seat, took down his hat from its peg, remarking that there was one woman at least who he knew would be very glad to dance attendance upon him, and as he thought he had rather neglected her of late, he would go and spend the evening with her. The moment he had gone, Jane rushed into the street, calling: "Come back, Richard, do come back!" but Richard had gone too far to hear, or did not choose to heed her cry.

"He's never left me before," she cried, as she returned to her desolate room; and conscience, with many a sting, told her that it was all her own doing.

Richard rapidly made his way to his mother's cottage; but when he reached it, all was darkness, and there was no answer to his repeated knocks. "Out nursing again, I suppose," he muttered, and not knowing whither to turn his steps for the evening, for he was determined not to return home till late, he stood hesitating.

"Well, Dick, my boy, what brings you away from your home and your wife to-night? It's a strange thing to clap eyes on you these days," said a voice at his side; and turning, he saw a man [154] with whom he had formerly worked.

"You're right; I don't often turn out of nights; but I wanted to see my mother, and I find she's out."

"The very ticket! your wife won't be expecting you back just yet; and we want a sociable, sensible fellow like you at our workmen's club. You've promised me many a time to come and see us; now's your chance!" said the man, clapping him on the shoulder.

"I don't care if I do look in," said Richard after a moment's deliberation; "but I mustn't be late."

"Come along, then," answered the man, well pleased with the chance of introducing a manly fellow like Richard to his companions in the neighbouring tavern, where the meetings of the club were nightly held. Suffice it to say, that late that evening Richard was helped to the door of his home by some of its members, with the understanding that he was to be enrolled among their number on the following evening. It would take too long to picture Jane's distress when she met him after her long waiting and remorse. Her husband in such a condition, and none to blame but herself! She did not sleep that night, and in those dark hours she determined that the past should be retrieved. She watched him anxiously the next morning, but he never spoke, except to answer her questions in monosyllables. Long before his time for returning from work had arrived, the [155] kitchen was spotlessly clean, the kettle singing on the shining grate, and Jane herself arrayed in a clean gown and new ribbon.

"Surely, he'll want to stay at home to-night, when he sees how pleasant everything looks again," said she to herself. When he came in, he took no apparent heed of his surroundings, but drank his tea in moody silence. When he had finished, he rose and took his hat, but Jane started up, crying:

"Oh, Richard, pray don't leave me again to-night! See how nice everything is, and I promise you it shall always be so."

"Don't take on so, lass," he said, touched by the sight of her tears; "I won't be long away, but I've made a promise, and must stick to it," and with that Jane had to be content. But though she watched until she grew weary he came not to cheer her loneliness. She had carelessly permitted him to leave her side, and now other influences were around him, and she must reap the consequences of her folly. From that time Jane's evenings were spent in solitude and tears. In vain she sought to keep her husband under the safe shelter of his own roof. When he would have yielded to her entreaties, his companions came and carried him away in triumph. Eventually, Jane grew resentful and careless, and when her first little one was born she had settled down to habitual neglect of her home and her own person. The responsibility of motherhood roused her to [156] fresh efforts, which, if she had persevered in them, might have proved successful, but she soon relapsed into her slatternly ways, and was content to spend her days listlessly nursing her baby, and musing upon the wretchedness of her lot. At first Richard had taken considerable pride in the tiny atom of humanity which had found its way into the home; but baby came in for her share of neglect, and after a while her father took little notice of her.

"Poor little baby! your father doesn't care for you or me! He loves the drink and his public-house mates a deal better than the pair of us," sighed Jane many a time. Well, Jane, who sent him to the public-house to find friends and amusements, in the first place? You have no one to thank but yourself you know, or you might know, if you would care to think. But Jane seldom did think, and the gulf in the cottage home between husband and wife grew wider and deeper as the months and years rolled away. Children were born to their lot of misery and neglect, and Jane had hard work to fill their hungry mouths and cover their nakedness. Pitifully small grew the weekly sum which Richard brought home to meet the growing need of those who belonged to him. How else could it be when so large a portion of his hard-earned money went to support the wife and children of the thriving publican whose house Richard patronised every evening of the week? [157]

"I don't know how you expect me to get bread and pay rent with that pittance," said Jane one Saturday evening as he threw a few shillings into her lap.

"If it isn't enough, why don't you go out, then, and earn for yourself, like many a better woman than you is doing?" he growled.

How low Richard had sunk! But he had only gone down one step at a time.

"And who'd look after your children, I'd like to know, while their mother's away slaving?" retorted his wife.

"Precious little looking after such dirty brats want. Something to eat once or twice a day, and mud to make pies of, and they're enough like their dirty mother to be satisfied," said Richard, scowling in disgust at his miserable-looking wife, who replied:

"I'm a good match for you, whatever you may say, although I should be sorry to have your red nose and bleared eyes." Richard muttered an oath, and his wife disappeared, having gone as far as she deemed prudent.

"I've a good mind to go out cleaning after all. It's a new idea. I can't sit in the house, and fold my arms in idleness while the children want bread," said Jane to herself that evening. "It's true enough that the children don't want much looking after. I dare say Mrs. Jones would take baby and give the others their food for a few pence, if I could get work." [158]

"I declare I'll do it!" she presently decided.

There was little difficulty in getting work, and for her children's sake Jane worked as she had never done before. With the continual strain on body and mind she grew prematurely old and worn; but there was no help for it. She must work now until all strength failed, for Richard's money ceased altogether, and the children were wholly dependent upon her exertions.

One day she went to a new place to which she had been recommended by one of her constant employers. Whilst she was cleaning a window in the room where the mistress of the house was seated at work, the lady commenced a conversation. Usually reticent about her own affairs, Mrs. Martyn's gentleness touched Jane's desolate spirit, and the story of her wretchedness was soon told.

"Were you happy when you were first married?" Mrs. Martyn inquired, and was startled by the vehement answer:

"Oh, yes, ma'am, as happy as the day was long! My husband was so good, and always spent his evenings at home. Ah, we were happy!"

"What made the difference, my poor woman?" was the next question, and Jane hung her head. She had long ceased to blame herself for her share in the wrong which had blighted her life. It all came back to her now; conscience spoke, and would not be silenced, and told her that but for her [159] wrong-doing, hers might still have been a happy home.

"It was my fault, ma'am," she faltered. "I was careless and neglectful of his comforts, and spoke sharply to him for no earthly reason, and he's that changed, I don't know him, and he gets worse. Look here, ma'am," and opening her dress she revealed a bruise, inflicted by a cruel hand, "that's the first time he's ever given me a real blow; but he'll not stop at that."

"Poor thing," said Mrs. Martyn, shuddering at the revelation of a sister's woe.

"Couldn't you try and win him back?"

"I tried years ago, and it was no use, and now he isn't worth it, ma'am," answered Jane.

"But suppose he could be drawn from his evil companions, and strong drink! Don't you think it would be worth while to have an affectionate father for your children, and a tender husband for yourself, Mrs. Watson?"

"Yes, ma'am, if it could be done; but I don't believe it could," replied Jane, despondingly.

"Will you promise me to make one more effort if I help you, and ask Mr. Martyn to look after your husband? He wouldn't be the first man whom my husband has helped out of the mire."

A flash of hope lit up Jane's face, and she said: "You're very kind to take any interest in a stranger, ma'am, I'm sure, and if it will please you, I'll try once more." [160]

"That's right; now go on with your work as quickly as possible, and I'll do my best to arrange some plan for you."

Jane's fingers fled over her work, as she looked into a possible future of brightness for herself and her children. "Hoping against hope," she called it, and yet she continued to hope.

At four o'clock that afternoon, Mrs. Martyn came to her and bade her lay aside her work, and prepare to go home.

"Never mind finishing, Mrs. Watson; the servant can manage very well now, and it is of the utmost importance that you should be home early to carry out my plan," said the lady. "Your husband comes home, you tell me, soon after six for his tea. Now you must have your kitchen as neat and clean as you can get it in the time. The fire must be bright, and the tea laid, and everything as much like it used to be as possible. In this parcel you will find a little good tea, and a chop for your husband, also a few other things which you may find useful. You may take the old carpeting you shook to-day; it will do to lay down before your fire-place. But, above all, you must be perfectly clean and fresh yourself, your best dress on, and a bright ribbon, if you have it, and your children to match. Don't forget anything, and Mr. Martyn will look in during the evening and

see if he cannot persuade your husband to come with him to the Gospel Temperance Room and sign the pledge. Remember, I shall be asking God to bless your effort, and I believe He will." [161]

"Oh, ma'am," cried Jane, with streaming eyes, "how can I ever thank you for your goodness?"

"Don't wait to try, but run off, or you will not have time to prepare for your husband's return."

With hurried footsteps Jane sped home. Arrived there, she begged Mrs. Jones to keep her baby until she was ready for her, while the other little ones were dismissed into the back yard. It was years since the grate had received such a polishing, or the floor such a scrubbing. When it was finished, Jane surveyed the work of her hands with satisfaction. "Now for myself," she said. Opening the bag Mrs. Martyn had given her, she discovered a white apron, two or three clean pinafores for the children, besides the things Mrs. Martyn had specified.

"I'll put on one of those print dresses I used to wear. It's faded and old-fashioned now; but it's clean, and that's more than the rags I've got are, and maybe Richard'll think I look something like I did years ago," said Jane; and, although there were lines of care on her forehead, and hollows in her cheeks, there was such an unwonted sparkle in her eyes as she tried the effect, that she scarcely recognised herself as the same forlorn-looking creature who had left the house that morning. [162]

"Come, children, I want you." Three ragged, unkempt little ones came running in.

"Oh, mother, what a nice fire!" "Oh, mother, what a lovely cake!" and "Oh, mother, how grand you look, and what a clean floor you've made!" were the exclamations that burst from the astonished trio, as they entered the room.

"Yes, it's a clean floor, and you must try to keep it so; and if you're good you'll get some cake when father comes home. Listen, children! perhaps if you're very quiet and behave yourselves, father'll stay at home to-night and every night, and then I needn't go out to work any more, and leave you alone all day long."

"Oh, mother, that would be jolly!" they cried.

Jane had scarcely imagined what a little attention would do for her neglected children, and she exulted in the thought that their father would scarcely know them. Baby's turn came last of all; and finally Jane sat down, with all preparations made, in no little trepidation, to await her husband's arrival. His heavy step was heard at last, and she rose as he entered the room, while her children clustered round her.

"Beg pardon, missis," stammered Richard, after a moment's stupified pause; "I've made a mistake somehow."

"Oh, Richard, Richard, you've made no mistake! This is your home, I am your wife, and these are your children." [163]

"Jane," he exclaimed, "what's come to you all? who's coming, and what's this cleaning up for?"

"Richard, my dear, there's no one but you coming, and this cleaning up is all for you; and if you'll only make up your mind to stay at home always, you'll never find any worse place to come to; but a great deal better in time, I promise you faithfully," and Jane sank down in her chair, unable to stand any longer.

"Well, my girl, I will say as it's the pleasantest sight I've set eyes on for many a long day. Put the baby down, and let's look at you again. I declare you look like the Jane I brought home years ago. I thought I'd lost her for good, I did; but here she is again," and he put his hands upon her shoulders and kissed her; the first kiss that his lips had left upon hers for years, and Jane melted into floods of tears.

"Oh, Richard," she said, laying her head upon his breast, "if you'll only forgive me and love me again, I'll make up for the past by being the best wife that ever a man had!"

"Nay, my dear, you've got no call to talk like that. I've been a wretched husband, and a bad father, and it's me as needs to ask forgiveness. Don't cry, lass, now don't, it hurts me," and Jane restrained her tears as quickly as possible, and with womanly tact seated the baby on his knee, and sent the other children to crowd round him while she made the tea; so that when they took their places at the table the strangeness of the scene had well-nigh disappeared. The children [164] partook freely of the good things which Mrs. Martyn's care had provided; but Richard and Jane found it hard work to touch anything, for the tide of recollections that swept across them and threatened at times to destroy their outward composure. After tea Jane anxiously watched her husband's movements, and in terror saw him rise from his seat.

"You're not going out, Richard?" she pleaded.

"Nay, lass, don't be afraid," he said, kindly, "I'm only going to wash, and make myself fit for the clean place and the clean wife."

Overjoyed, Jane bustled about, and quickly put the children to bed; and when Richard entered the kitchen again, she was sitting with needle in hand and a pile of ragged garments by her side.

"This looks like old times, Jane," he said.

"It's my fault that there's ever been any change, Richard," she answered, humbly; "but if you'll only help me, we'll have our happy home back again."

"I don't know what to say, Jane, to always staying at home with you. You see, there's the club, and I'm almost bound to attend the meetings sometimes, and they're held in the 'Green Dragon,' and when once a fellow's there, he can't get away in a hurry."

"Oh, Richard, let the club go. It'll never do you any good, and unless you break away altogether, it'll be the ruin of you."

Richard looked thoughtful, but said nothing. [165]

Just then there was a knock at the door, and he started up, saying:

"That's some of my mates. I'll send them off to-night, Jane, anyhow."

"Oh, that it may be the kind gentleman who has promised to come!" thought Jane.

It proved to be Mr. Martyn, and Richard waited with the door in his hand, in doubt as to the stranger's errand.

"Are you Mr. Watson?" asked the gentleman. It was so long since Richard had heard himself addressed in such a manner, that at first it did not strike him that he was the man who bore that name.

"That's me, sir. Will you come in?"

Mr. Martyn walked into the kitchen, glanced round in pleased surprise, and took the chair that Jane proffered.

"Now, Mr. Watson, I have only heard of you this afternoon, but I believe you're just the man we want."

"Glad to help you in any way I can, sir," answered Richard, in much surprise.

"Well, we have taken a hall down the road, here, and we want to fill it with working-men whose evenings are free; make it a comfortable, homely place, you know, with books, and papers, and harmless amusements, and an occasional lecture or address, with, perhaps, a little speechifying among the men, as some of them know how to talk sensibly. We only commenced last week, but [166] we are getting on nicely, and intend, on Sunday evenings, holding a lively service, with plenty of singing. Will you join us?" asked Mr. Martyn.

"I should like to, sir; but don't talk of me being the one to help you, for I want helping myself. Perhaps you don't know; but I've been going down, down, these six years and more, and I'm fairly sick when I think what a fool I've made of myself," said Richard, with drooping head.

"Come, my friend," answered Mr. Martyn, with his hand on Richard's shoulder: "that's the first step towards becoming a wiser man. The second is, to make up your mind that the past shall be retrieved as far as that is possible, and that for your wife and children's sake you'll turn over a new leaf."

"It's easy to talk, sir, excuse me; but you don't know what that means for a poor man like me," said Richard.

"I do know something about it," replied Mr. Martyn; "it means, every day, facing, like a man, the taunts and jeers of your fellow-workmen. It means fighting with all the power you have left, and all the power that God can give you, against the terrible cravings of the appetite for strong drink which you have created for yourself. It means giving up any pleasure which you have found in the excitement of the tap-room, and the company of your so-called friends. But let me tell you [167] what else it means. It means holding up your head, like a being created in God's image, as you go through life. It means retaining the love of your wife and children, and once more rejoicing in home comforts and fireside joys; and, above all, it means putting away from you the greatest and most effectual hindrance to your walking in the narrow way, which leads to the heavenly home and eternal life, in the presence of God."

Richard was much stirred by Mr. Martyn's words. He buried his head in his hands, and when he looked up again, there were traces of deep emotion on his face.

"Sir," he said, "I thank you from my heart; it's all true, and a deal more than you've said, but I never heard it put so plain before. I've a mind to come round to your place to-night; leastways, if my poor wife'll spare me," added Richard, with unaccustomed consideration.

"I shall be delighted, Richard, if you'll go; and thank you, a thousand times, for your kindness, sir," said Jane, her face beaming.

"You can come, too, if you like, Mrs. Watson," said Mr. Martyn.

"Me, sir! Do you mean it?"

"Why of course. You don't think we give invitations to married men without including their wives?"

"That's a new idea," said Richard, "but I don't know but what it's a good one. We shouldn't get [168]

into half so much trouble as we do if our wives went about with us more. I'm glad to have you, Jane; it's a long spell since you and me went anywhere together."

Satisfied with the success of his errand, Mr. Martyn led the way, chatting to his companions, until they entered the hall. There were many working-men already there, some lounging in chairs, or on forms, with their papers or books; others deeply interested in the game of chess, or draughts. A few were smoking, with glasses of refreshing, but certainly not intoxicating, beverage before them. Richard was wonderstruck at the novel scene, and its air of thorough homeliness.

"This'll be the place for me, Jane," he whispered.

An address had been announced for that evening, and Mr. Martyn was expected to speak. After leading Richard and his wife to seats, he mounted the platform at the end of the room, and in a friendly, familiar style, commenced to talk with the company. Most of them laid aside their occupations, well pleased to listen to one who was known to be the friend of working-men, and ever ready to help them in the difficulties and temptations of their daily life. Like dew on thirsty ground fell his wise suggestions, his timely warnings, his earnest counsels, upon the ears and hearts of the new-comers.

Responding to the invitation with which he closed, they, with two or three others, stepped [169] forward and asked to sign the pledge, tremblingly venturing to hope that even for them the future might hold a new life.

We may take the liberty of raising the curtain which conceals it from their view, and assuring our readers that their hopes were realised, for the old brightness and love found its way back into the home in which sin and misery had reigned for years. Trusting no longer in their own strength to keep the good resolutions with which they commenced the new life, they found that He, whom they had slighted and forgotten, was not only ready to forgive their past sin and folly, but was mighty to save and keep them to the end of life's journey.

FOOTNOTE:

[B] Reprinted by permission from "The Opposite House," published by T. Woolmer, 2 Castle Street, E.C.

[170]

DOWNWARD STEPS.

"MAY the Holy Vargin an' all the blissid saints purtect us! Here's yer father comin' up the coort as dhrunk as a pig. Get along inter hidin' wid yer, childer!" So saying, Mrs. Ryan, who had been standing with her baby in the doorway of her wretched home, gossiping with the neighbours, stepped into her kitchen, and awaited the arrival of her drunken husband with trepidation. "Maybe he'll tumble upsthairs an' slape off his dhrops, bad cess to him for a nasthy silfish brute," she muttered.

But no, Donovan Ryan staggered into the kitchen, and greeted his wife with an inane smile, which in no wise deceived her, taught by many an experience, how more than likely it was that the next moment his tipsy amiability might be exchanged for the utmost fury. [171]

"An' what will I be gettin' for yer tay? Shure ye're home airly the night," she tremblingly said.

"It's yersilf that's mighty oblagin' intoirely, an' hasn't Donovan Ryan, at yer service, ma'am,"—making a low bow which nearly lost him his unsteady balance,—"a right to kem to his own home whiniver it may plaze him, widout askin' yer lave, ye miserable, dirthy, scoldin' broth uv a wumman?"

Donovan had raised his voice from low, mocking accents to stentorian tones, which shook the little room.

Poor Mrs. Ryan shrank further and further away.

"Shure, Donovan, I meant no harm at all, at all. Be aisy now; an' I'll git ye a cup uv tay in a jiffy," she said, coaxingly.

But, according to his ideas, Donovan had received a grievous insult, and there was only one way in which the said insult could be avenged; and, being made of that stern, courageous stuff of which some few of our British workmen are composed, he proceeded to teach Mrs. Ryan, in a very practical manner, that she really must not venture to offend the perfectly justifiable ideas which he held of his own importance and dignity. In all wifely submission, as in duty bound, and according to long-established custom, she made no demur to the very ordinary proceeding which occupied Donovan's attention for the next few minutes.

"See what ye'll git for venturin' to interfare wid yer husban'," he said, as he paused for want of breath. [172]

With a well-directed kick at the prostrate form before him, and a few genial imprecations on womankind in general and his own wife in particular, he shuffled out of the house.

"He's been up to his tricks again; a beatin' of his poor wife. It's well he ain't my husband. I'd never stand it as she does, poor creature," said one of the women who were standing about.

"I don't see how you'd prevent it; but I'm going in to see whether poor Mrs. Ryan is quite done for."

Mrs. Fisher, the last speaker, left the group and entered her neighbour's house. In response to a feeble "Come in," she opened the kitchen door, which Donovan had slammed behind him. Mrs. Ryan was sitting on the floor crying bitterly.

"I'm kilt intoirely, Mrs. Fisher, an' me poor babby's frighted to death. Shure her father's a murtherin', battherin' wretch. I'll take him afore the magisthrate, I will."

"Poor thing, let me see what I can do for you," said Mrs. Fisher.

A few womanly ministrations, a cup of tea and kindly words, and Mrs. Ryan was comforted.

"Don't be thinkin' hardly uv Donovan. He's civil spoken an' kind enough whin the dhrink's out uv him; an' I'll have to put up wid his cross worruds an' his batin's, for he's me husban' an' the father uv me childer," were her parting words to her neighbour.

It was easy to be seen that Mrs. Ryan had proved no dull scholar, but had readily learned the manly logic that might is right almost as perfectly as her husband had intended that she should. [173]

"I'll keep your children to tea, Mrs. Ryan; and, if you like, they can go with my Jimmie and Alice to some children's affair they're holding in the school-room round the corner this evening."

"Shure ye're the bist uv neighbours an' I'm grateful to ye for riddin' me uv the worrit uv of the childer for a spell. But will ye jist sind Meg in afore she's off to the matin'? Me head's crazy, an' she must git me a dhrop uv the craythur to put a bit uv spirit inter me."

Mrs. Fisher promised, and then left the house.

After tea, little Meg, a forlorn, wiry child of eight years, came in and fetched the stimulant which her mother craved, and with which Mrs. Ryan comforted herself over her trying lot.

About eight o'clock the little ones returned. Three unkempt, ragged urchins, full of excitement about all they had witnessed.

"Oh, mother, sich pritty picthures, an' sich fine singin'. An' sich nice spoken jintlemen an' ladies."

"An' sich swate cards wid ribbon to hang 'em up."

"An' what was it all about, thin?" asked the weary mother, roused to interest.

Meg answered: "The jintlemen tould us that the dhrink was a curse an' a shame, an' he said it made folks cruel an' bad—" [174]

"Thrue for him!" interjected the mother.

"An' he said," continued Meg, "that it wad be betther for no wan niver to touch it at all, at all, an' thin they wad niver git dhrunk. An' he wanted all the childer in the room to sign a promise niver to put it to their lips; an' heaps uv 'em wint up an' signed, an' got a card wid their names on to hang up, an' Mrs. Fisher's Jimmie an' Alice signed. An' we said we'd ax you, mammy, an' maybe you'd say, 'Yes,' an' thin we could sign nixt week."

"Yes, an', mammy, we don't want to be like daddy whin we grow up, so we may sign, mayn't we?" eagerly put in Teddie, the youngest.

"Ye might be worse nor yer poor father, an' don't ye say a worrud against him; an' as for ye signin' the pledge, ye'll do no sich thing. A dhrap uv the craythur now an' thin won't hurt a livin'

soul; an' I'll not have ye sit yersilves up to be betther nor yer own father an' mother." And poor deluded Mrs. Ryan finished her third glass of hot whiskey and water, and drained the sweet dregs into the open mouth of her wan-faced baby.

A few days after, his drinking bout being over for the time being, Donovan Ryan sat over the kitchen fire watching his wife's preparations for tea.

"Shure, Patty, have ye heard that Harry Fisher has turned teetotal?" he suddenly said.

"Niver, shurely, now; what's the likes uv him, as niver gits dhrunk more nor wance in a blue moon, nade to be jhinin' a wake-minded, wathery set like the teetotalers?" exclaimed Mrs. Ryan, [175]
in a tone of irritation.

Donovan stirred uneasily.

"Sorra am I the man to say he's made a misthake, for I'd jhine that same set mesilf if I thought I'd howld out whin the dhrink craze takes me."

"I'd be ashamed to own ye for me husban' if ye made such a fool uv yersilf, Donovan," cried his wife, with energy. "It's thrue enough ye overstips the bounds uv sobriety oftener nor Harry Fisher, more shame to ye; but to make out ye're afeard uv a dhrap uv the craythur, an' give yer worrud niver to touch it, wad be to confess yersilf a poor wake gossoon widout any sperrit in him at all, at all."

Mrs. Ryan was never afraid of her husband in his sober moments, as will be readily observed. Indeed, at such times, he stood somewhat in awe of her sharp tongue. On the present occasion she continued to rail against water-drinkers and their weakmindedness, till, as if ashamed of the moral cowardice he had evinced, Donovan said:

"Whist, wumman, hould yer tongue, ye've no nade to fear I'll jhine the teetotalers, so make yer mind aisy on that point."

After which assurance Mrs. Ryan cooled down, and allowed her husband to smoke his pipe in thoughtful silence.

"What on airth are ye thinkin' uv, Mrs. Fisher, to let yer husban' sign against a dhrap uv good [176]
beer?" she said the next morning to her neighbour.

"I'm downright glad he has, and I mean to do the same. You see, the children's set the example, and were so earnest for their father to sign, that he made up his mind to do so. I wish you'd let your little ones do the same, and persuade your husband too."

"Bad cess to ye for settin' yerself up to be suparior to yer neighbours, and advasin' uv them to follow yer example. Faix, I'd rather me husban' git dhrunk ivery blissid day uv his life, an' bate me black and blue inter the bargain, nor sign the pledge." And in high dudgeon Mrs. Ryan went in, slamming her door behind her with great violence.

Weeks and months passed away, and still, in the dingy court where the Ryans and Fishers lived, the same sad scenes of sin and degradation were witnessed. One day it was rumoured that the Fishers were moving into a better neighbourhood, which rumour proved to be correct.

"An' didn't I say as her ladyship, wid her illigant slips uv childer, an' her jintleman husban' wad soon be too suparior intoirely to mix wid the likes uv us. Axin' yer kind lave, shure it's Peggy Ryan as wishes ye ivery blissin', an' has the honour uv givin' ye a partin' bit uv advace. Lave yer dacint neighbours alone, an' don't hould yer head up so high, me dear." Thus saying, Mrs. Ryan stood in front of Mrs. Fisher, who was about to follow her goods and chattels out of the court, and, to the [177]
amusement of the bystanders, spread out her scanty skirts, and made a sweeping curtesy. For some time past Mrs. Fisher had found it difficult to live peaceably among her neighbours, proving how advantageous to health and pocket her own and her husband's Temperance principles had been, they had both tried to secure adherents to the good cause. They had met with little success, and in some instances, notably that of Mrs. Ryan, had earned for themselves continual abuse and scorn.

Years passed and Donovan Ryan went down to a drunkard's grave unwept and unhonoured. With rapid footsteps his wife followed him, leaving to the children as her legacy, the craving for intoxicants which had been engendered in their infancy and ministered to with such assiduity in following years.

Is the story improbable, impossible? No, for thousands of lives cursed with the disease of drink attest its truth.

There was a ray of hope seen; there was help offered in earlier years; but some hand, perhaps that of the wife and mother, quenched the hope, and thrust aside the offered help, and forced those for whose salvation it was responsible into paths of ever-deepening darkness and rayless despair.

HOW JARVIS WAS SAVED.

"IT'S quite true, ma'am, I've been a drinker; but, indeed, I've given it up, and if you'll only give me a chance of redeeming my character, you shan't ever regret it."

The lady who was thus addressed looked up from the letter she had been reading, somewhat doubtfully, at the speaker who was a woman past her early youth, red-faced and coarse-featured, but with honest gray eyes and a set mouth that bore witness to the purpose indicated by her words.

"But you lost your last situation by giving way to drink," said Mrs. Reston.

"Yes, ma'am, I did. I had got into the habit, and nothing was kept locked up, and I couldn't help taking it when the longing came on me."

The woman was singularly frank the lady thought, and after further conversation, it was decided that she should enter Mrs. Reston's service as cook. [179]

"You will find no temptation to drink here," said Mrs. Reston. "I keep all intoxicants under lock and key, and the housemaid does not take anything of the kind. So you see, if you really wish to reform you have a good chance, and, indeed, if I did not think you were sincere in your wish to turn over a new leaf, I would not engage you."

The woman's voice broke a little as she thanked her future mistress and left the house.

"Really, Edmund, I was so struck by her intense desire to begin a new life, and as in every other respect her character was unimpeachable, I thought here was a fine opportunity of putting the golden rule into practice," replied Mrs. Reston to her husband's remonstrances upon the rashness of her proceeding.

"What a woman you are! You know that such an argument is unanswerable, and I must retreat from the field vanquished," laughingly remonstrated the husband, and the matter dropped.

"Now, Jarvis," said Mrs. Reston, when a few mornings later she had given her orders to the new cook, "I dare say you will miss your usual stimulant for some time, and you are quite at liberty to make yourself coffee or cocoa whenever you wish, and if there is any other way in which you may be helped to fight against your besetment let me know, for I want you to look upon me as your friend."

Cook stammered something unintelligible, and, somewhat surprised at her agitation, Mrs. [180] Reston left the kitchen.

"If this don't beat everything! Nothing but lectures and black looks have I ever had before, and now to think of a real lady speaking so kind, and saying she wanted to be my friend!" And, in her excess of astonishment and emotion, Jarvis stood and watched the milk for the pudding she was about to make boil over, and then mechanically emptied what remained into the coffee dregs which were yet standing on the breakfast table. Weeks passed away and Mr. Reston ceased to tease his wife about her latest philanthropic effort, and Mrs. Reston forgot to watch Jarvis with anxiety, and dismissed all misgivings as to the prudence of the step she had taken.

"Breakfast not ready yet! how's this?" asked Mr. Reston one morning, entering the dining-room at the usual time, to find the housemaid just commencing to lay the cloth, and his wife looking troubled.

"It can't be helped, dear. Symonds has been single-handed this morning, for Jarvis is not down yet," replied Mrs. Reston. Her husband raised his eyebrows and coughed significantly as he sat down and took up his newspaper.

"What's the matter with your paragon, my dear?" he presently said.

"I haven't asked her yet," was the dry answer. Mr. Reston thought he had better not pursue the subject, and relapsed into silence. After he had left the house, Mrs. Reston examined the contents [181] of the cellaret, and came to the conclusion that Jarvis had been helping herself in large quantities from the stores of wine and spirits kept there.

She had been visiting with her husband the previous evening, and the housemaid had also been out, thus leaving every opportunity for Jarvis to indulge in the stimulants she had stolen.

Mrs. Reston also remembered that on returning home she had found the key of the cellaret, which she had missed, lying on the floor close to the side-board, and the door locked as usual. Symonds had come in to prayers alone, and said that cook had gone to bed with a bad headache.

"Send Jarvis to me as soon as she comes down," she said to the housemaid, who answered her summons.

"It's too disappointing," she soliloquised; "I felt so positive that Jarvis would do well; I am sure there is nothing I have left undone to help her in her attempts to abstain." Kind, good Mrs. Reston, there is just one thing you have left undone; but when you shortly learn how you have failed to do all that was necessary to effectually help your weak sister, will you have sufficient courage and love to enable you to remedy the past and help to save a soul from perishing in its sin?

There was a knock at the door, and Jarvis entered with swollen, downcast eyes and face redder than usual. [182]

"Well, Jarvis," said Mrs. Reston, after a moment's silence.

"I've got nothing to say, ma'am; I can go as soon as you like," sullenly replied the woman.

Mrs. Reston sighed. Was it any use to give Jarvis another trial, or should she send her away at once? She looked at the half-averted face and the nervous hands that were busily folding and unfolding the hem of her apron, and with a wave of pity surging in her heart for the sinning, suffering creature before her, said quickly and tenderly:

"But I don't want you to go, Jarvis. I want to save you, if you will let me. Come, tell me what else I can do for you."

Jarvis looked up, half doubting the evidence of her senses.

"Ma'am," she gasped, between heavy, choking sobs; "do you really mean to say that you care about saving such an ungrateful wretch as me?"

"Why, Jarvis, of course I do. I will do *anything* to help you."

"Would you, oh would you do anything, ma'am?"

Again Mrs. Reston repeated the assurance. Battling with her emotion, Jarvis said: "I'm ashamed to ask such a favour at your hands, ma'am, but I believe there's only one thing under heaven that would be the saving of me."

"What is that, Jarvis?"

There was a long pause, and then Jarvis blurted out: "I've never signed the pledge, ma'am; but [183] if you'd draw up some kind of a promise to keep from the drink, and put your own name to it, and let me sign after, it would be the saving of me."

"What a strange thing to ask, Jarvis! What good would it do you to know that I, who am always moderate in my use of stimulants, had given them up?"

"Oh, ma'am, it would make me feel that somebody in this wide world cared enough for me to give up something for my sake. I've never had any one to care for me since my mother died fifteen years ago. I made up my mind that I would be independent of every one and look after myself, and when I felt dull I just took a glass, until I got into the habit of taking too much. When I came here you were so kind to me that I couldn't help feeling you were different to my other mistresses who only seemed to care how much they could get out of me, and I've been that grateful, ma'am, I would have done anything for you; but last night I got low, and the longing for drink took me, and something whispered: 'There's your mistress for all her kind words, she's none so different as the rest of them, only she's got another way with her. You're a good cook and suit her well while you keep from the drink, and she thinks if she speaks fair she'll manage you well enough.' And then, ma'am, I thought of your beautiful wines which you could take without any harm to yourself, while my beer had done such cruel work for me, and suddenly the thought [184] came: 'Why, your mistress cares for those luxuries that she takes every day far more than she does for you, you poor thing; she wouldn't give them up to save you from filling a drunkard's grave.' Then I grew desperate, and came in here to see if there was anything left about, and the key for once was in the side-board, and, and——"

"Yes, I know, my poor Jarvis, and now let me tell you that I do care more for you a thousand times than for the luxuries you speak of, and to prove it, I will never touch them again. I promise that, for your sake, Jarvis, do you understand?" For Jarvis was standing looking stupified. Her wide-open eyes suddenly filled with tears, and she fell at her mistress' feet, and seizing her hand covered it with kisses.

"Oh, ma'am, you've saved me, you've saved me," she said again and again.

Yes, Jarvis was saved. From that time she steadily fought against her deadly sin, until its besetment lost all power over her.

After years of devoted service she became the happy wife of one who loved and trusted her, and to whom she confided the story of her past degradation, and how she was reclaimed by the efforts and self-sacrifice of her former mistress.

[185]

WHY THE ANGELS REJOICED.

"GOOD-NIGHT, Mrs. Seymour. Must you leave so quickly?" asked a lady of an elderly woman, who was hurrying past her pew with the stream of worshippers that were leaving the chapel after the Sabbath-evening service was ended, without waiting for the short prayer-meeting which usually followed.

"Yes, ma'am, I can't wait a minute longer, for my husband's promised to go to the Mission Hall, and the angels are going to rejoice to-night," answered Margaret Seymour with a radiant light of expectancy upon her pale face.

"God grant that you may not be disappointed," returned the lady, with a cordial pressure of the hand, and, as Margaret hastened out, her friend inwardly marvelled at the strong faith which, during a lifetime of neglect and cruelty, had sustained her poorer sister through terrible seasons of hardship and toil.

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Margaret Seymour had early left a Christian home to become the wife of a man, who, destitute of any real religion himself, soon commenced to mock and persecute the woman who had been induced to take a false step, hoping to win her husband to seek for himself the joys which were hers. But, hitherto, the hope had proved vain. Richard Seymour had sunk lower and lower, until, enfeebled in health by his drunkenness and follies, his family mainly depended upon the exertions of the wife and mother for daily bread. Still, Margaret's faith did not fail. If she worked incessantly all day long, and often far into the night, her prayers went up without intermission to the Throne of Grace. There had been a time when she had trusted the answer was at hand, for her husband had been induced to attend a small Mission Hall near by, and whilst there had been powerfully moved, and for a few weeks had given up some of his sinful pursuits; but just when Margaret and the friends from the Hall were beginning to rejoice over Richard as a "brand plucked from the burning," he fell back into his former habits.

Margaret was sorely disappointed; but, casting herself again upon the faithful word of her God, she took up the cross apportioned to her, and went on her way in confident assurance of coming blessing. But for some weeks past her desire for her husband's salvation had intensified, and she had felt moved to pray with an earnestness that surprised even herself. Her cry became that of the patriarch: "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." But no apparent result manifested itself. Indeed, Richard appeared to grow more hardened and desperate than ever, and it required all the grace and patience that Margaret possessed, to endure his continual cruelty with meekness.

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On the Saturday evening preceding the Sunday when she had expressed her conviction of a joyful termination to her anxious watching, a knock was heard at her door, and opening it, the kindly face of one of the workers from the Mission Hall was seen.

"Is your husband in, Mrs. Seymour?" asked the man.

"Yes," answered Margaret, in an undertone, "he's just sitting down a bit before going out for the evening; but come in and you'll catch him nicely."

"Good-evening, Mr. Seymour, I'm glad to find you at home," were the words that caused Richard to look up in angry surprise.

"Evenin'," he muttered by way of reply, without removing his pipe from his mouth.

"I'm real sorry to have missed you from the Hall for so long, Mr. Seymour, and I've been wondering whether you meant to leave us altogether. We only want to be your friends, you know, and you don't want to run away from those who would do you a good turn if you'd let them," said the worker, nothing daunted by his ungracious reception.

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Again Richard looked up, and perhaps the fact that his visitor was a working-man not much above his own station in life, rendered him more susceptible to the attention shown him. And besides, the spoken words were not mere empty talk, Richard could not but acknowledge; for practical help in dire need had found its way to the poverty-stricken home, from the Christian friends who had rallied round his wife. So, with half-shamed face, he answered gruffly:

"I didn't think of comin' again; such places ain't for the likes of me."

"And who do you think they are for then? Why, my man, it's poor folks like you and me, who wouldn't feel comfortable in grand churches and chapels, that want such homely places, where we can slip in and out without being looked down upon."

"Maybe you're right so fur; but you don't want no smokin', drinkin' fellers, anyhow," responded

Richard.

"You're making another mistake, Mr. Seymour; for the truth is, we're better pleased to see them turn up than any other sort of folks; so you'd better give me leave to call for you to-morrow evening at eight o'clock, before the service begins."

"Well, I'm beat. You mean to take it out of me, somehow, and I may as well give in, but you needn't trouble to call. I'll come, sure enough."

"That's settled," said the man, rising to go, adding, as he offered his hand to Richard, "You won't forget." [189]

"No fear, with my old woman to pester me," answered Richard, with a grim relaxing of his features. But as the door closed behind the visitor, his face darkened, and, although he said nothing to his wife, he sat gloomily watching the fire for a long time, then, muttering something about "them interferin' folks," he put his pipe into his pocket, and passed out into the street.

"God grant they may have interfered to some purpose!" said Margaret.

Hastily finishing the domestic duties which were filling her hands, she turned for encouragement to the Book which had proved its power to solace and cheer in the darkest hour. Presently, with thought and desire too intense to allow the usual posture of devotion, she rose, and began to pace her kitchen, while she wrestled and interceded for her sinning husband. It was during that memorable hour of strong crying, that the sweet assurance of a speedy answer was given; and the language of petition no longer poured from her lips, but gave place to that of thanksgiving for another repenting one, over whom there would shortly be rejoicing "in the presence of the angels."

But to the eye of sense, nothing seemed more unlikely, as Richard staggered home late that night in his usual drunken condition, and rose the next morning in the worst of tempers, [190] following her footsteps from place to place, with the evident purpose of provoking her with his cruel taunts, until she should retaliate. Clothed in the armour of God, Margaret, however, withstood all the fiery darts that were flung around her during that eventful day. As the winter afternoon waned, she observed, with uneasiness, that Richard made no attempt to change the working clothes in which he had lounged about all day, for the better suit and the clean shirt, which she had managed by dint of self-denial should never be wanting.

"I'm pretty sure he'll make that his excuse for not going to the Hall to-night; but there, the Lord isn't confined to that place, and He can just as well save Richard in his dirty shirt at home, if He thinks best, as up there; and He's going to do it, sure enough; for didn't He tell me the angels should rejoice over him?" she said to herself. She ventured, however, a quiet remonstrance, saying: "Your Sunday things are laid out, Richard, and you'd better get a wash; you'll feel fresher." But the only answer she received was a curt: "Mind your own business, woman."

Meanwhile, Richard himself was feeling his own misery more deeply than he would have confessed to a living soul. "I'd like to escape from it all; but I've gone too far; I've had my chances, if ever a man had, and I'd like to know what good'll come of my goin' to the Hall and [191] seein' all those folks again; it'll only make me more miserable than I am. I wish I hadn't promised, and I've half a mind to turn into the 'Blue Boar' instead," muttered the man to himself.

"Richard," said his wife as she put on bonnet and shawl, and picked up her Bible and hymn-book, after tea was over; "I'm going up to the chapel, but the sermon will be over in plenty of time for me to get back to the Mission-place. You'll be sure to be dressed and ready waiting for me."

"I shan't promise nothin'," growled Richard; but although Margaret heard the words as she went out, she left the house with a light heart. Altogether uncertain of his own intention, Richard strode about the room, his pipe in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets.

"Anyhow," he said, "I may as well have a look at the water," and going to the sink he washed himself for the first time that day. And then he sat down, making no further attempt to prepare himself for his wife's return. "She never lets a feller have any peace," he said, inwardly blaming her for his mental unrest. He was sitting in his chair, still smoking, when Margaret returned.

"O, Richard, you are not ready, and we shall be late!" she said.

"I never told you I was goin'," he answered, scowling at her.

"No, but you told Mr. Brown so, last night; and if you aren't there soon, he's sure to come [192] round, and see what's the matter, as he would be certain to suppose you'd keep your promise unless something had happened."

Surely it was heaven-sent wisdom that breathed in the words with which she answered Richard's evasions. She was unprepared for the sudden effect of her reply. Rising in haste, he said: "Here, get me my things as quick as you can; I don't want that feller again." In a few minutes, neatly dressed, Richard went up the street with his rejoicing wife.

They were singing as the two entered; but Margaret walked boldly up to the top of the room, and Richard was reluctantly compelled to follow her. He would have chosen to have slipped into the first seat by the door, from whence egress could have been easy; but his wife determined that once within those four walls, Richard should stay until the end of the meeting. So she allowed

him to pass into his seat first, and then she followed him. But there was little fear of Richard being anxious to leave the place; for, after the first prayer, he sat spell-bound, and riveted to the spot, while the Holy Spirit revealed to him his guilt and sin. His wasted life rose before him until the burden of his misery seemed too great to be borne, and he could no longer prevent groans and tears from bearing witness to his anguish of soul.

"Come and speak to my poor husband, will you, please, Mr. Brown?" said Margaret, as the people were dispersing. The man crossed the room, and sought to pour in the balm of Gilead to [193] the wounded conscience.

"You don't think he died for such a big sinner as me?" was the response. "Why, man, you don't know what a life I've led my poor wife there! She's been beaten and kicked, and half-starved most of her time, while I've spent my money in what's ruined body and soul, and you mean to tell me that I may be saved from the hell I deserve?"

"Yes, I mean just that, and the Saviour tells you so in His own words; so there can be no doubt about it."

"Let me know quick what He says," groaned the man. Mr. Brown took a pocket Bible from his coat and read the following passages:

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out."

"Do you mean to say that's written all fair and square, in black and white?" asked Richard, who had been listening with open mouth to the slow reading of the inspired words.

"Yes, I do; here, look for yourself." Richard grasped the book and, following the direction of [194] Mr. Brown's finger, with difficulty spelled out for himself the blessed promises and invitations. As he reluctantly handed the Bible back, a sigh of relief broke from him, and he exclaimed: "Ay, it's there, sure enough! so He came to call sinners, did He? drunkards like me!" A wonderful light overspread his face, and as the truth broke fully upon his troubled mind, he started to his feet crying out: "O, what a mighty Saviour! Bless Him, bless Him, for He died for me!" The workers gathered round in silent joy as the shout of a King rang through the place; but Margaret fell upon her knees and broke into praise that was surely no faint echo of the exulting song which pealed through the courts of heaven as the glad tidings were proclaimed of another soul new-born into the liberty of the sons of God.

"Ah, my dear," said Richard to his wife, as late at night they sat together in their home: "I've been a brute to you and the children; but, God helping me, I'll make amends."

"Don't trust to yourself, Richard, my dear; you'll get plenty of chaff from your mates, and plenty of temptation from within, and you must look for help to Him who's got all needful strength and grace for you," replied Margaret, as they sat and talked with one another far on into the early morning.

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"I say, nurse, can't you give this 'ere feller a sleepin' draught, or summat as will keep his mouth shut for a spell? There's no such thing as gettin' a wink o' sleep with him a shoutin' 'glory' all the time," said a rough man who was occupying one of the beds in the infirmary.

"Poor fellow! it's a wonder to me how he can bear so much suffering and never open his lips to complain," answered the nurse, turning her kindly eyes towards the adjoining bed, where lay Richard Seymour, wasted by the ravages of a sore disease, doubtless the result of early excess and long years of intemperance. After witnessing a good confession of his faith before ungodly companions, and for his Master's sake enduring scorn and persecution nobly, he had suddenly been laid low on the bed of death.

"You needn't make any wonder of it, nurse," he answered; "I don't feel as if I could grumble at my pain when my blessed Lord suffered on the cross for me—praise His dear name!"

"Queer kind of a chap, ain't he?" said the man who had first spoken, moving uneasily in his bed.

"Ay, Jim, I wish you knew what it was to feel 'queer' after the same fashion. You may if you like, you know; the same mercy's for you as for me, and O, mates!" said Richard, looking round upon the rows of faces that were turned towards him; "it may be 'queer;' but it's worth while havin' somethin' that will make you so happy when you come to face death, that you can't sleep for [196] thinkin' of the blessed Saviour, and how He's waitin' for you."

So Richard testified to his fellow-sufferers until the last. Early one morning the nurse heard him whisper faintly: "I'll soon be at home over there." The next moment he quietly closed his eyes in death. Verily, a brand plucked from the burning, a sinner saved by grace.

FLETCHER AND SON, PRINTERS, NORWICH.

Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

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