

RACHEL NOBLE'S
EXPERIENCE.

BY
BRUCE EDWARDS.

Twenty-Third Thousand.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Directors of the Scottish Temperance League having offered a Prize of One Hundred Guineas for the best Temperance Tale, upwards of eighty MSS. were received in reply. The Rev. Norman L. Walker, Rev. James A. Johnston, Rev. James Hill, Rev. William Blair, M.A., and Rev. John Brown Johnston, D.D., kindly consented to act as adjudicators, and the following is their decision :—

GLASGOW, *8th October*, 1862.

Having been requested by the Directors of the Scottish Temperance League to adjudicate on the manuscripts forwarded to them in reply to an advertisement offering £105 for a Prize for the best Temperance Tale, we are unanimously of opinion, after having carefully perused the eighty-three manuscripts submitted, that the Prize ought to be awarded to the Tale entitled—

“RACHEL NOBLE'S EXPERIENCE.”

108 HOPE STREET,
GLASGOW, *24th November*, 1862.

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RACHEL NOBLE'S EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN the census was last taken I put down my exact age to a day, but as there is no call for doing the same thing on this page, I need not say how many years it is,—more now than I sometimes like to think of—since I carelessly lifted a newspaper, and read an advertisement in it to this effect: “Wanted, as companion to a lady, and to assist in housekeeping, a lady not under twenty years of age, of sensible, firm temperament. To a competent person, a liberal salary will be given. Apply, &c.” At this time I was living with distant relations—an old gentleman and his sister. Kind, good people they were, but the stillness of the atmosphere which surrounded them was something that might be felt. They led what appeared to me the life of vegetables. I had been with them for three years—I daresay I might have been with them still, but I was intensely wearied, and longed for change, any change. I had one sister, a very dear sister, some years younger than myself,

who was still at school, and we were in what is called "reduced circumstances;" that is, we had youth, health, and good animal spirits, but not much money. While our parents lived, that commodity had been about us in great plenty; but what wings it borrowed, or to what part of creation it betook itself, I don't know—only it was gone.

I pondered the advertisement: "Companion to a lady;" but what kind of lady—was she young or old, mild or irritable? and the "house-keeping,"—but I felt quite equal to that—that was my *forte*, my tastes were not at all above it, I may confess. Place me in the management of a house, and I felt like a small, diamond, feminine edition of Napoleon; I could map it out, stick in my different coloured pins, and fight a battle when called for, as well as he. And then it was a situation to the proper filling of which apparently no *accomplishments* were needed. If I had been accomplished, perhaps I might have made more of existence where I was; if I had been an enthusiastic musician, for instance, or if I could have transferred to my sketch-book a faithful portrait of the grand old gnarled trees about; but, alas! I could only listen to the birds among their branches, and carry their pictures most faithfully in my memory. Even reading was not a "resource" to me; not that I did not occasionally read a book, and enjoy it too, but I could not read at any time, nor at all times, nor everything that came in my way.

No, accomplishments were not needed, at least they were not asked, but "a sensible, firm temperament." Had I that? Well, modestly speaking, I thought I had; at least, I had an average share of common sense, and nerves not easily shaken. "To a competent person"—then probably this lady's patience had been tried by incompetent persons. Suppose she were to think me incompetent, how would I feel, and how would I look? Hitherto no person had paid me wages; I had been the employer as yet, not the employed. But when I considered the number of *feckless* people that float about the world, trying, it may be, to do their feeble best, but, whatever their work, doing it in a shambling, unsatisfactory way, and so worrying the righteous souls and tempers of their "competent" brethren, I wondered what I would think were it revealed to me that I belonged to this class. Still I knew that I was good at house-keeping, and if the lady were reasonable, I did not despair of making my way with her too. Of course, she wished a sensible, firm temperament to control her servants, which I could easily imagine a great comfort to a lady possibly in delicate health. At all risks, I determined to answer the advertisement, and I thought I would enclose at least one testimonial, which I could easily get from our minister.

I walked over to the manse in the evening, and was not long of making my first effort to push in life, by explaining my errand to Mr

Virtue. He looked his surprise, but politely refrained from expressing it. He knew, I dare say, as all the neighbourhood did, that I was not rich, but I believe he thought that from my previous habits and ideas I would be above taking a situation, especially such a one as this. He said, "What do Mr and Miss Acroyd" (the friends with whom I lived) "say to this?"

"I have not mentioned it to them, and think it unnecessary as yet."

"I don't think they will like you to leave them."

"I don't think it either. I am sure my going away will be as unpleasant to them as my coming was—that was a great inroad on their ways. I shall be very sorry to leave them, and most glad to return if they should in any way need me."

"I wish you may find such a situation as this congenial, Miss Noble."

"Perhaps not; yet it is possible I may. The poor lady may be just wishing to have an elder daughter."

"That is a pretty way of putting it, but I have the idea that reasonable kindly people can generally find elder daughters without advertising for them; it is likely that this lady may have worn out the patience of everybody she has any claim upon, and some one is expected to do for money what they would not do for love."

"Well, money is a wonderful stimulus."

"And you wish to refer them to me. I am

to give you a testimonial. I think you should ask references as well as give them."

"That may be done."

"Very well, what am I to say about you?"

"Oh," said I, smiling, "just that I am a deserving, sober-minded person, who, in your judgment, is fitted to fill such a post."

"Good." Whereupon Mr Virtue took writing materials, and after some minutes' consideration, wrote his account of my qualifications, which, when I had read, caused me to blush. I said, "This will never do; if I send this I shall be selected, and at once, and great will be the disappointment when they find I fall short of the expectations you raise in this document."

"No fear, I don't think it overcharged."

As I could not, in common politeness, ask him to write another, because this was akin to fiction, I had nothing for it but to take it as it was, although satisfied I was not. I did not then know how readily clergymen gave flattering testimonials, probably from a mingling of official and personal kindness, in the spirit of that charity "which thinketh no evil." If I had, I would have had fewer scruples about using this one, as I would have thought that others might know it too, and so make allowance. Such as it was, I posted the testimonial along with an answer to the advertisement that night, and then told Mr and Miss Acroyd what I had done.

I had gone to our minister, thinking that he would approve of my making an effort to do something for myself, and my fellow-creatures,

in however humble a capacity, but he hadn't. He had more than hinted that he thought me imprudent, if not foolish. Mr and Miss Acroyd were people who had dozed through life. Mr Acroyd was timid and shrinking as a woman; he had a comfortable independence, according to his habits; nothing compelled him to face the world, so life had slipt past this pair apparently without a ripple. They fed their poultry, looked after their garden, and took their daily walk; they read a little, and napped a little, and summer and winter were gone. Far be it from me to say they did no good; it was not till both were under the sod that I discovered they did much good in their own way. Whenever a benevolent thing could be done without fuss or eclat, especially if it could be done without being found out, they hastened to do it. Millions of such workers in secret are on this earth, else humanity would turn corrupt to the core; and it is refreshing to know any of them in those days, when everything is somehow made capital of, when a benevolent enterprise is torn to pieces by much talking, and when a man working in a quiet way, is likely to be transfixed in the newspapers, the delicate bloom brushed from his efforts, and the whole thing whisked into the management of committees, under the eye of the public. Well, it is the genius of the age, and may perhaps work better than some think. "Union is strength," is it not?

It was a question of proportion with me, if

Mr Virtue had disapproved of this formidable step of mine, what would not Mr and Miss Acroyd say? They listened quietly till I had finished my speech, and then Mr Acroyd said, "You are quite right, Rachel, quite right; if I had my life to live over again, I would not hide my talent in a napkin, as I am afraid I have done." And his eyes looked into my face with an expression I had never seen there before. I was surprised; I was moved. I had sat by his hearth for three years, and this was the closest and farthest glimpse I had had into his inner self. His sister said, "It's no to be thought that you would like to be aye mewed up wi' the like o' us; but Rachel, you'll mind there's an open door here, whenever you like to enter it." I found that it would cost me more to leave them than I had counted on.

About a week later, I was sitting at the drawing-room window, when a gentleman unknown to me passed it. A moment after, I heard him ask for Miss Noble, and the servant opening the room door, he entered.

He said, "Miss Noble?"

I bowed. "My name is England, Dr England. I think you answered an advertisement"—he stopped, and I supplied the words—"Yes, for a companion to a lady, and to assist——."

"Exactly," said he. "Well, I am a friend of that lady—in fact, the family doctor; and as Mr Morgan, her husband, understood that I was to be in this part of the country, he asked me to call and see you."

"And judge whether I am aught like the article required," thought I; but I only bowed.

"I hinted to Mr Morgan," the doctor went on, "that a lady in the prime of life, that is, about fifty" — he looked gravity itself — "would be more suitable, but he thinks a young lady more likely to get on well with his daughters."

"How old are they?" I asked.

"The eldest is sixteen."

"Can they not be companions to their mother?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It seems not; they are engaged with their education, and so forth, you know."

"And Mrs Morgan—"

"Is delicate—at times not equal to family cares," and a look crossed his face I could not make anything of. Now, I knew an individual, so much given to put the mildest construction on everything, that I heard her say of a man who was raving mad in an asylum, that he was "delicate," and a vision of Charles and Mary Lamb, setting out on a visit, with a strait-jacket among their impedimenta, crossed me, and I thought if, as a person of firm temperament, I was required to put a strait-jacket on the lady occasionally, that would be something more than even I bargained for.

I said, "Delicate? not mental affliction, is it?"

"No," he said slowly. "The truth is, Miss Noble, doctors have to be discreet. I may say, by-the-bye, that companions are none the worse for that quality either. But I may tell you at

once, that if you take this situation, you will have no sinecure; if you expect an easy dilettante kind of post, it is a great mistake; but if you think you have a mission, as the phrase goes—if you want to try to do some good to your fellow-creatures, I can promise you a fair field.”

“They have not had a person in this capacity before?” said I.

“Why; yes, they have, one.”

“And may I ask how she got on?”

“She did not get on at all—she stuck. She was a curious being; she amused me; I studied her.”

Before I almost knew, I said, “Perhaps you promise yourself amusement from studying me.”

“Perhaps I do,” said he, quite coolly; “but it is a game that two can play at.”

“I should not like to be studied as a failure.”

“I have the impression that you wouldn’t fail; I’m going to call upon Mr Virtue, and if I hear nothing very bad from him, you may take a week to consider whether you will engage yourself or not. This is Mr Morgan’s address, you will let him know your decision.”

I had accompanied him to the door; he turned round on the step and cast his eye over the front of the house; it was covered to the top with jessamine just newly in flower, “That looks picturesque,” said he, “but I don’t know that it is conducive to health.” He broke a spray, and put it in his button-hole, then taking in with a glance the garden, shrubbery, and the fine old elm tree that stood sentinel at the gate,—which

were all dozing peacefully under the autumn sunshine, he said, "This seems a calm haven."

"Excessively so," said I, "all we require is somebody to run a pin into us, to prevent us falling asleep; this haven is always open to me."

"I wish such another was open to me."

Lifting his hat, he said, "Good-bye," and disappeared through the shrubbery gate. I was sure of three things about Dr England,—he was young, he was tall, he was good-looking, and I thought that probably he was an able man, for he had a broad nose; this standard of judgment, I had derived in childhood from Goldsmith's "Animated Nature," wherein it is stated that broad nostrils are indicative of mental breadth; but his forehead bore out the notion also, it was well developed: his hair and complexion were neither dark nor fair; his eyes were large and grey—not round, but a good oval; and his nose, though it had certainly a greedy grasp of his face, was straight, and suited the character of the face; his mouth was firm and expressive—indeed it expressed riotous good spirits. I imagined he was out for an autumn holiday, as his dress was a grey travelling suit, and his hat a low-crowned, brown straw—not professional certainly.

He was not gone when I began to picture forth the Morgans,—the father likely immersed in business, for I found they lived in the suburbs of a large manufacturing seaport town,—Mrs Morgan, delicate and spirituelle, hardly equal to the cares of her position; most likely

they attracted an intelligent and cultivated society round them. Miss Morgan I fancied of a studious, intellectual turn; there were other members of the family, I knew, but to them I had no clue whatever,—and the servants, probably old and attached, at any rate, trustworthy. But then I was making out that mine would be an enviable position. Now, Dr England had said that it would be no sinecure. Well, a man's ideas are different from a woman's; I daresay he would think, to be a nondescript kind of being, in any house, was not very pleasant; but we'll see. Companionship for the mother, sympathy for the daughters, an eye to the housekeeping; after all, it is formidable; and the last young person did not get on at all—she stuck, said the doctor; it may be foolhardy; but—I said I'll try.

So it was settled, and I started for L——. It poured of rain, it was dark, and getting late when I arrived in that city. I got a cab, and giving the driver the address, "Mr Morgan, Honeycomb House," I found that whatever Mr Morgan's line of business was, he was well known, for to some remark of mine, the cabman, in his answer, seemed to imply that it would be rather curious if he did not know him. I settled myself in the vehicle, and said, "Now, I'll soon know the best and the worst of it." A drive of twenty minutes or half-an-hour brought us to a large iron gate, my driver got down, opened it, and led his horse in a short way over gravel, he then ran up some steps to the door,

and ringing a peal which might have announced a countess, he let me out of his cab, and carried my luggage up to the door. All this, and paying him, which I did liberally, took up some time, and still the door was not opened. "They're long of coming," said he, "but I would like to see you in, Ma'am;" again he jerked the bell with a vengeance, and at last the door was opened, by a smart, good-looking girl. I enquired for Mrs Morgan. "You can't see Mrs Morgan, to-night," said she.

"I can see Mr, or Miss Morgan, then, I suppose;" and I stepped into the handsome, well-lighted hall, without invitation.

"Please carry these things in;" and I pointed to my trunks. She said "Oh," to herself, in an under tone, and took in my luggage. I then gave her my name, and she opened a door, shewed me in, and announced, "Miss Noble." I stood in the middle of a very pretty drawing-room; two girls were in it, one—her neck bent like a swan's over a very ornate desk—was writing on pink note-paper; the other was curled in the corner of a sofa reading—three bright gas-lights were shining down on them—a capital fire filled the grate, and really the room, and its inhabitants, looked at once, cosy, dreamy, and refined. The eldest, about seventeen, Miss Morgan, looked up, and eyed me carefully from head to foot, but bent over her desk again, and began to write; the other jumped up, and cried, "Oh, Lizzie, this must be the lady papa told us of."

"Of course it is," said Miss Morgan, coolly.

"Then why do you not——?"

"Why do I not what?"

"Oh, Lizzie," then turning to me, "Would you take a seat near the fire, or would you go up stairs first, Miss Noble?"

"I'll go up stairs first, I think."

"Then I'll show you the way. Papa is from home, and mamma is in bed. I hope you left all well at home, Miss Noble?"—making an effort, such as little women (she seemed a mere child, though I afterwards found she was twelve years old,) sometimes make, to say something to their elders, which will be appropriate and hostess like.

"Quite well. I hope your mamma has not been long confined to bed?"

"She has been in bed two days, but she has not been very ill this time," and a tear gathered, while her face looked scared. I said cheerily, "Oh, then she'll likely be quite well to-morrow, and come down stairs."

"I hope not to-morrow," she said very earnestly. "Papa will be home the day after to-morrow, and then we'll be all right."

In a little while we descended into the drawing-room and found Miss Morgan still writing. She raised her head again, and again surveyed me and all my appointments. She visibly inspected my gown, its make and texture, my collar, my brooch, my hair, coolly and haughtily, and then continued her occupation as before without speaking. Again the little woman fell

to laboriously and conscientiously trying to say something suitable, "Are you fond of reading, Miss Noble?"

"Not very," I said.

"Perhaps you may have met with this work, 'The Tales of the Castle' by Madame Genlis; very excellent and amusing. I have finished it, and was just half way on with this when you came in, 'Bruce's Travels in Abyssinia'; it is very nice. John gave me it on my last birthday,—would you like to read it?"

I thanked her, and said I had read both these books, not yesterday to be sure, but I could remember that I had enjoyed them much. Then there was a pause. I felt a little tired, and said to my small hostess—that if she wished to continue her reading to do so, as we should have plenty of time yet to get acquainted. This did not altogether seem to suit her notions of politeness; however, she took her book, and I, seated by the fire-side, wondered how I had come there, and why. Suddenly Miss Morgan closed her desk, looked at me, and said, "Miss Noble, have you any brothers?"

"None," I replied. She gave a great yawn, and said what a bore these long dark evenings were; then she got up, and began waltzing backwards and forwards before a large mirror that nearly covered one end of the room. "Lizzie," said her sister, "Miss Noble will think you silly."

"Fan, I don't mind what Miss Noble thinks."

"I don't think you silly," I said; "I like to

see you dancing; I am very fond of dancing too."

"You fond of dancing, gracious! I didn't think you would be fond of anything."

"Indeed; do I look so benumbed?"

"Persons that answer advertisements, are generally in the old fogey line."

"Lizzie, Lizzie," said my little friend, entreatingly.

"Never mind, Fanny," I said, "I like plain speaking, although I think it's a good rule not to say anything disagreeable, when there is no good to be served by it."

Miss Morgan looked a little crest-fallen, and danced out of the room. Fanny came to me, and said, "Miss Noble, you must not mind Lizzie, she is not always like that, she is often very kind, and good-natured."

"And you are always kind, and good-natured?" I said.

"I don't know, but oh, I'm so vexed;" and deep sobs suddenly choked her voice.

"My child, what is it?"

"Mamma, mamma," she said most plaintively.

"But mamma will soon be better, no doubt of that."

"I am not sure. Do you think so? Can you do her any good?"

"I'll try; I'll do my best. I came just for this purpose."

"I know," she said, drying her eyes. "Oh, if you were but able!"

Shortly, Miss Morgan came back, and her

sister said, "Lizzie, do you think I should ask John to come down?"

"No, Fan, I don't; he doesn't want you to disturb him."

"He says I never disturb him. I am sure he would come, if he knew Miss Noble was here, when papa's not at home too."

"Well, you had better go, and see if you can charm him down with Miss Noble's name," said the young lady, ironically. As her sister left the room, she came near me and said, "Miss Noble, do you expect to be very happy here?"

"I had no distinct expectation of any kind," I said.

"Because if you do, I doubt you'll find yourself in the wrong box. We are rich, but you must know we are vulgar, at least so Miss O'Shee, your predecessor, the descendant of Irish kings, told me. She said, 'Miss Morgan, your papa may be rich, but he is vulgar, and uneducated; he gets his money in a low, vulgar way; and for yourself, your nature is essentially vulgar.' She was awfully roused when she said that. I had just told her, that she had fallen in love with Dr England—that's our doctor, which was true enough. Do you think it lady-like to be in a hurry? I don't. Well, Miss O'Shee, a lady by birth and education as she told us, was continually in a hurry and worry. Her grand worry was to do her duty, and her next grandest worry was not doing her duty, and so she worried on till she left. I wonder how you'll do."

"You'll see by-and-bye, I daresay," and before

either of us could say more there entered Fanny, and a young gentleman, whom she introduced as her brother John. John Morgan might be two or three and twenty, his complexion was pale and sallow, his hair and beard were black, his eyes very fine, dark ones, scintillated like the Koh-i-noor, but I am bound to say that his forehead fell too suddenly back for my ideas of intellectual vigour. I believe he made it his aim to be gentlemanly, and he succeeded so well that you did not see the aim much, if you saw it at all. That was his sole affectation. He was kindly and considerate, and when it came out in the course of the evening that he was to be a minister, I thought it likely that he would be popular in his parish, but probably not an orator. Miss Morgan eclipsed her brother and sister in every way, except—so far as I had seen yet, in kindness and good nature—rather important exceptions. She was tall; she was eminently graceful; her figure dipped and recovered itself like the water lily; she was fair; she had the profile of a Grecian statue; her hair, simply tucked behind her small shapely ears, covered her neck with rich massive golden curls, they were not silky nor satiny, I question if they got much brushing. As she pirouetted through the room, making clever and impertinent remarks, I felt that if I had been a young gentleman, I would have said, “Now, that’s the kind of creature I want to catch, and have the taming of.” The young ladies where I had come from, such of them as I knew, were all so mild and correct,

and so much after a pattern, that really Miss Morgan seemed piquant. What kind of atmosphere had she grown in, or had she just been left to hang as she grew? She seemed at war with some crook in her lot, which as far as I could see as yet did not seem an undesirable one. As for Fanny, she was at an awkward age, but she had the promise, in a different style, of nearly equalling her sister in appearance; at present she looked pale and delicate, and at times depressed, poor little thing.

Mr John soon rang for the supper tray, considerably supposing that I might be tired, and wish to go to bed early. But it seemed that to ring a bell, was one thing, and to get it answered another. No one obeyed the summons. He rang again, and a third time. "What can they be about?" he said.

"Oh," said Miss Morgan, "Sarah will be at the back door with her sweetheart, and the other two don't think it their business to bring up the tray." At length, somewhat breathless, and with a heightened colour, Sarah appeared. "Why did you not come, when the bell was rung the first time?" asked Mr John.

"Please sir, I was in the back-green a—a message, and didn't hear it."

"Well, look sharp next time, and bring up the tray—there now," he continued as the girl withdrew, "I needn't have tempted her to tell a fib."

"It wasn't a fib," said Lizzie, "she was out a message."

"Who sent her?" asked John.

"Love, who laughs at locksmiths, and bell-hangers, and a few other professions also;" rejoined Miss Morgan. When Sarah had brought the tray, Mr John took a key from his pocket, and giving it to her, bade her bring the wine, and spirits, from the sideboard in the dining-room. When we had eaten heartily of the good things, John said, "Now, Miss Noble, what shall I help you to, for the good of the house, as my father would say—wine, or shall I brew toddy?"

"Toddy, if you please," I said.

"Toddy!" exclaimed Miss Lizzie; "a lady prefer toddy to wine! Miss O'Shee would have told you it was very vulgar."

"Very probably it is, I don't dislike vulgarity altogether, and I like a glass of toddy after a long journey, on a damp day."

"That's good sense now," said Mr John, filling his glass. "Do you happen to have such a thing as teetotalism where you come from?"

"I think there was; I think I have heard of one or two of the villagers holding forth on that subject, but I never paid much attention to it."

"Aye, you'll always find in a community a proportion of men with a tremendous itch for public speaking; generally uneducated persons, who can never see a medium in anything; it's a fine theme for them teetotalism, or as they might call it, with more propriety, temperance run mad."

"Still," I said, "if there are people who can't take any kind of spirits without taking too

much, wouldn't it be safer for them to abstain altogether?"

"Undoubtedly," said he; "if a man is so deplorably weak as to be unable to control himself, by all means let him try every prop within his reach."

"I haven't thought much about it," I said; "I have never had anything to do with drunken people, further than seeing them on the roads or on the streets; but when I have met them, I have sometimes felt, that if I had any near relative a drunkard, a brother for instance, I think I would have been a teetotaler."

"Ah! I doubt you are not sound. Do you mean that because a small section, I believe it is a small one, of the world's population is drunken, that the rest should wholly abstain from and banish strong drink?"

"Well, Mr Morgan, I doubt my principles are narrow, and selfish, and feminine. No, I don't go so far as that."

"That's the teetotal principle, however. I have been thinking over it seriously of late, both in consideration of what my present position is, and of what my future one may be, but I can't see my way to teetotalism."

"There are people," said I, "to whom I would be very loath to deny such an indulgence; the old people with whom I lived, for instance, they took their glass of toddy every night, without, I am sure, either thinking of vulgarity or drunkenness."

"Exactly; but if a teetotaler saw Lizzie

helping herself to wine, as she is doing, he would likely picture her being picked off the street, and being carried home on a shutter. A glass of wine at one end of the line, and a shutter at the other—there's no halting-place." Miss Morgan laughed. Fanny, who had left the table, and was sitting on a stool by the fire, turned round and said, "I don't think that at all laughable—I think it very shocking."

"Come, Fan," said her brother, "I'll just give you half a mouthful, it will cheer you up."

"Not any for me, thank you," she said.

"Do you know, Miss Noble," said Miss Morgan, "that Fan is a teetotaler; I am not sure but she went to some meeting, and put down her name to some extraordinary pledge."

"Now, Lizzie, I didn't—I couldn't do it; when we live—I mean when papa makes his mon—that is, in the circumstances."

"Never mind, Fan," said her brother, "you are a dear little curiosity; when I get into the manse you'll keep my house on teetotal principles, and we'll have a society too."

"Oh, John," she said eagerly, "do you really mean it?"

A newspaper was lying on the table; Miss Morgan took it up, and said, "Isn't this a nice paragraph." She read—"New Broom Parish. This parish is certainly not falling behind the age, either in physical or moral improvement. Much of this is owing to the untiring exertions of its esteemed minister, the Rev. John Morgan, and his excellent sister. They have estab-

lished a flourishing teetotal society, and, by getting up harmless, elevating amusements, they have succeeded in nearly emptying the public-houses. We understand that Miss Fanny Morgan herself presides at the piano during the meetings of the weekly concert, and Mr Morgan is at present giving a course of lectures, on, on"—she hesitated for a second—"On Woman, her duties and capabilities.' He has always a full house. The local Punch enquires—"Did he ask his father first?" She repeated this exactly as if she had been reading it, and laid down the newspaper with perfect gravity, and Mr Morgan and I, and even Fanny, who did not seem in a laughing mood, laughed heartily, and Mr Morgan gave me a glance, which said, "Is not she clever." Yes, capricious and wayward she might be, but she was no dunce.

We parted for the night, feeling quite acquainted with each other. I might have been the heroine of a novel, for in common with that exalted being, "I went to bed but not to sleep." I kept turning my new friends over and over in my mind, nor could I desist. Miss Morgan puzzled me most. In what circumstances had she been trained, and by whom, that with so much capacity she should show herself so foolish and absurd? I couldn't think she was heartless; for although you will meet not unfrequently with a good heart and a small mind, a good mind very seldom wants a good heart—a most fitting pendant. Towards morning I fell asleep, trying to patch up some

kind of consistent theory about Mrs Morgan. I thought an interview with her would shed light on various things that puzzled me: it had struck me as odd, for instance, that Mr John should carry the key of the sideboard in his pocket.

CHAPTER II.

FROM the cursory look I had taken of my bedroom, by the gas-light of the previous night, I had thought that it was a very neat, well-furnished apartment, indeed, but it did not show so well in the light of the morning. The furniture was handsome, but it had a dreary, out-of-repair look; the mirror had been crossed by a duster in a random way, and islands presented themselves on its glassy surface. Many other little signs showed the want of an efficient mistress. When I descended, I found Miss Fanny, and Mr John, and another young man, to whom the latter introduced me as his brother David, who had not got home till late the night before. Miss Morgan was generally too late in the morning, and at their request I proceeded to make breakfast. Here my housekeeping eye was again offended; the knives, forks, and spoons, were not half polished; the cups and plates were cracked, many of them; and in general the service had

the punished look—I can't find another word to express the idea—which things have in some houses, how acquired, is a mystery to me. When I break a piece of crockery, I break it; but my cup had got a tremendous crack from the top to the bottom, which nearly brought my heart into my mouth, for the cup being white china, the crack looked like a great black hair. How the article had got such a blow, and survived it, was the wonder. However, thought I, I will get all these little things put to rights, in good time.

Miss Morgan arrived when we were nearly done. She did not suffer from being looked at in daylight; she seemed sleepy, and in bad humour; but I must confess that I caught myself, like a lover, thinking that even that mood became her. She had a pink morning gown, with small white collar, and cuffs; her hair was huddled below a net. She commenced eating without, of course, a word of apology. Mr John opened letters; Mr David read the newspapers. Addressing Miss Morgan, I asked her, "what she thought it likely her mamma would take."

"I am sure, I don't know;" was the curt reply.

"I took up mamma's breakfast, the first thing I did this morning," said Fanny.

"How is she? I hope she is better," I said.

"Yes," replied Fanny; "I think she is considerably better, but she has promised not to leave her room to-day."

The young men continued reading, although

I saw they both listened while Fanny spoke. Miss Morgan kept her eyes on her plate; none of the three made a remark. It struck me as peculiar. Mr David was the first to leave the table; he went into town early to business, I understood. He was a year or two younger than his brother, and wholly unlike him. He was fair; indeed, I may just as well say at once, that his hair was red and his beard; he wore a pointed beard; his face was sharp, so was his manner; his brow square, and his hair brushed so as to stand erect, with the harmless view, no doubt, of adding to his stature, which was under the middle size. Fanny went off to a school in the neighbourhood, where she told me she was a day-boarder. Mr John went to his study, and Miss Morgan and I were thus left to ourselves. She gave the keys, including that of the side-board, into my keeping, and showed me over the house, which she said was not in good order.

"But servants are such a set! It is my belief," she went on, "that the cook drinks; she is so dirty in her ways. Indeed, so is Mary the housemaid, and when I tell her that her work is not rightly done, she is so insolent, as to say she didn't come here to be found fault with by me!"

"If they are so bad, I wonder you don't send them away, and get better."

"Send them away! how long do you suppose we keep them?"

"Six months, at any rate."

"Seldom two; they are engaged by the month; that girl Sarah has not been quite a month, and you saw last night,—but the other two are enough to corrupt a half dozen."

"It must be trying for your mamma."

"Mamma! what does she care?" She suddenly stopped.

I said, "If she can rise above being worried by bad servants it is a good thing in her delicate state. Do you not think I might go to enquire for her, as she is better this morning?"

"Oh, no! I am pretty sure she is not herself yet; better wait till to-morrow."

I spent an hour or two mastering the household details. I laid my plans to feel my way gradually to a reformation. I resolved to write to Miss Acroyd and Mrs Virtue requesting them to look me out two good servants to replace the present, if I should find them as bad as they were called. The girl Sarah I liked; her appearance pleased me, and as she was quite young, I thought I could make a good servant of her. Well, I had mentally turned the house topsy-turvy; and, as yet, I had neither seen the master nor the mistress. As I meditated, Miss Morgan came dancing into the room where I was, and stopped humming a tune to ask, "I say, Miss Noble, how long do you take to put on your things to go out?"

"Not long; why do you wish to know?"

"Because an omnibus passes the door in half an hour, in which I am going into town, and I want you to go with me; I mean to buy a bonnet."

"Will it do to leave the house, and your mamma, with nobody to——"

"Stuff—Sarah has nothing else to do but answer mamma's bell, and we're not going to be away the whole day."

I allowed myself to be persuaded. Miss Morgan was going to buy a bonnet, and I was a country cousin anxious to see the city and its wonders.

For some part of the way we drove along a road studded on each side with handsome villa residences, having more or less of ornamental shrubbery about, like our own Honeycomb House; then, still on the road, we came to blocks,—or lands, as they are called, of houses; then more blocks of houses, not of such a high class, all the ground floors being occupied as shops. I noticed in the last range we passed, before we began to rattle over the streets, a very showily got up corner-shop, and very substantial looking too, with the name over the door in large gilt letters, "Morgan & Son, Wine and Spirit Merchants, Wholesale and Retail."

I said to my companion, "Your name cuts a dash there."

She nodded, and smiled. We passed yet another shop of the same kind, with the same name on it before we left the omnibus. We left it, Miss Morgan told me, not far from the centre of the city. It was the principal street for traffic we had alighted in. I could not but feel bewildered with the crowd and bustle. It

was a most handsome street. I was much struck with the *coup d'œil*, but Miss Morgan hurried me away; we turned into a quieter street at a side. "Now," she said, "I'm going to take you into one of the quieter localities; you'll not think it very pleasant perhaps, but I'm quite accustomed to it;" and she led the way.

We passed through several streets,—among others, a rather long, quiet, back one, which struck me as being most dull and dismal; the inhabitants seemed the poorest of the poor. I counted seven children, crawling about at different doors, apparently incurably lame, with washed-out faces, and eyes out of which I thought reproach looked. The houses were old and tumble-down-looking; they had corbie gables and outside stairs; here and there was a dingy cellar, out of which coals were being retailed in pennyworths; shops there were, whose six-paned windows displayed the usual stock of tapes, thimbles, sweeties, and halfpenny picture-books; and in one window was an announcement I had never seen before, which both moved and tickled me, "Treacle *ale*, one half-penny per bottle." The advertiser, who was obviously a pushing trader, lent out brushes at a penny per hour,—a branch of the concern which, if anything extensive, would, I thought, pay well. In the next street, into which we turned, we encountered a mob. Miss Morgan pulled me into a doorway, and said, "Stand a moment, till they pass."

"What is it?" I said.

"Oh, some drunken row, no doubt;" and as the mass passed before us, we could see two drunken women in its centre—one with a child about a year old in her arms. They were quarrelling in loud, dreadful language; and as each staggered and reeled, the infant swung and swayed to and fro, so that I thought it would be sent headlong to the ground. A great pent-up cry was in its face—terror kept it in; I had never seen a baby-face like it. I confess a feeling of sickness came over me. I said to Miss Morgan, "That is very terrible."

"Shocking," said she; "the police will be up immediately"; and I saw two stalwart, tall castles in blue, in the shape of the said officers, elbow the crowd aside, grasp each an arm of the two miserable beings, who now made common cause, and struggled, and shouted, but the men quietly and coolly, without losing temper amidst such a hubbub, half-walked, half-carried them off to the police office.

Miss Morgan looked at my perturbed and whitened face, and added, "Well, to be sure, how it strikes a stranger; I'm seldom in the street that I don't see something like that." She tripped across, and down a little bit, and into a shop—a contrast to its neighbours—bright with paint and varnish. I glanced up, and saw over the door, the name—"Morgan & Son." I followed; she was asking the man behind the counter "if young Mr Morgan was in." He said, "No; but he will be, in a little." Whereupon, she went up a narrow, wooden

stair, which I found led to a sitting-room, off which, was a neat bed-room, before the mirror of which Miss Morgan was already surveying herself; it was natural. I confess, with small inducement comparatively, I seldom pass a mirror without looking into it.

"Perhaps," she said, "you suppose that I brought you to get your taste about my bonnet."

"Well, did you not?"

"Not a bit," said she. "I want to screw some cash out of Mr David, and I thought your presence would be valuable. This is a convenient place, isn't it? Papa and David sometimes stay here all night, when it suits them. You see the relation we stand in to 'Morgan & Son,'" and she laughed. "Papa has five shops in the town; the two you haven't seen are far the finest; this is the most humdrum of any, and yet papa says that it pays even better than the others; but I think he has a kind of sentimental regard for it—he began life here. You've heard of poor boys coming to a town, with a penny in their pockets, and arriving at, &c., &c.; he's one of them. I wouldn't tell you, if I thought there was any chance of your being kept in ignorance; but it will be among the first things he'll tell you himself. Mamma is of nobler origin. It must have been her great-grandfather that was the poor penny boy, I think, for her family had been great merchants for several generations. It was thought condescension on her part to marry papa; however, her relatives became bankrupt,

and went all to the bad, and papa was glad to pay her brother's passage to Australia. You would be sure to hear all that too, although I didn't tell you. Latterly, Miss O'Shee wouldn't come here with me. She said it was a vulgar shop, in a low neighbourhood, engaged in a vulgar trade. I said, I wondered she took papa's money—did she not find it soiled her fingers? There comes David."

Mr David was as smart as the tailor and his own taste could make him; his manner was smart, with the commercial smartness of L——, and easy, with the easiness of a youth who knows that he has money at his back. He, I found out in time, had a vast respect for money; as, indeed, is right and proper. No doubt we wonder at the stupidity of the old Jews worshipping the golden calf, and are surprised that Aaron should have connived at it; but, unquestionably, it is a most respectable beast; and if the priests in our day put out their hands and stroke its neck—who shall blame them? Blame them, indeed! I've been at a lecture on chemistry, at the close of which the identical mixture which the ancient wanderers in the wilderness were forced to drink, was handed round to the company in tumblers, and if nothing worse than *that* overtakes us and our priests, we may go on our ways rejoicing.

He, Mr David, I mean, not the calf, had his good qualities. He wasn't a highly educated man, nor very intelligent, but he was a keen business man, and the prop on which his father

leant; he hadn't many opinions and ideas—but those he had were fixed and immutable; and if there was nothing about him to draw out deep affection, there was nothing to repel a moderate liking, and you were inclined to feel rather amused at his little personal vanities—his anxiety to make the most, and the best, of the rather scant measure of outward man that had fallen to his lot.

“Now, David,” said his sister, “we’ve had our time put off waiting for you; just make up your mind at once, that I want five pounds, and must have it.”

“Has my sister been showing you any of our lions yet, Miss Noble?” he asked, taking no notice of the application for money.

“None,” put in Miss Morgan, before I had time to speak. “Miss Noble was immensely taken with a drunken row we saw coming along—two women fighting—now, quick, David, make your pun,” (it was a foible of his, punning,) “say they weren’t lions, they were tigers, and give me the cash.”

“Yes, Miss Noble,” said Mr David, “there are often melancholy sights to be seen in our streets. I am sorry to say drunkenness is too much the habit of the people—they don’t seem capable of knowing when to stop.”

“Now, David, we are capable of knowing when we can’t stop; hand over that money, if you please.”

“What can a girl, like Lizzie, Miss Noble, want with so large a sum as five pounds?”

I replied, "I really don't know what she means to do with it, but I daresay she has more sense than spend it foolishly."

"Thank you, Miss Noble, I must say you are just the opposite of Miss O'Shee; I do believe I could not say anything better about you."

"You'll be all butter and honey as long as Miss Noble suits your humour; wait till she crosses you," said David, addressing his sister.

"David, what did that Albert chain and locket cost? that was surely money put to a good use—whose hair have you got in the locket? Let me see," and she made a snatch at it which he evaded angrily.

"Don't be rude, Lizzie, I work for my money."

"Well I don't, I'm an ornament for mine. Ornaments are always luxuries and should cost more, but I wager you get ten times as much as I do. Come now, Davie," she went on coaxingly, "give me the five pounds; I wish papa had been at home, I can wind him round my little finger."

"Yes, that shows that you have the more need of me to look after you; I'll give you half."

"I won't take it; I must have the five pounds."

"What is it to do?"

"You have no business."

"Miss Morgan," I said, "wishes a bonnet, and perhaps some other things; I think you might trust her so far."

"Well, for once," he said, "if you, Miss Noble, will keep a look-out on her, and see how she

spends it;" and very reluctantly he counted five notes, which his sister hurriedly put in her portemonnaie, and said,

"Now, as quick as you like, Miss Noble, we'll be off."

She went into a shop, where she bought a bonnet and a few yards of ribbon, directed them to be sent to Honeycomb House, paid them—ten shillings was all they came to—with loose change which she had, and we were in the omnibus going home, all in a quarter of an hour. She put the ribbon on the bonnet herself, for she was a dexterous creature, and she did not buy another thing for three months—what became of those five pounds? I felt curious about this, and interested in Miss Morgan; if she had been a plain-looking, stupid girl, I question if I would have felt an equal interest, but if I am to blame in that, I have plenty of company. If Queen Mary had been an ugly, common-place person, and died in her bed, who would have cared about her? Would any poet choose Queen Anne as the heroine of a tragedy?

CHAPTER III.

NEXT morning, after we had separated to our respective employments, Mrs Morgan sent for me. I had to introduce myself, for Miss Morgan had gone out as well as the others. It was a day that she had a music lesson in town. I

confess I was more curious to see Mrs Morgan since I had seen her family. I wanted to know in what kind of maternal atmosphere Miss Morgan had grown up.

Mrs Morgan was sitting in bed, with a handsome shawl round her shoulders and a very becoming cap on her head. She held out her hand to me, and said, "It is awkward for you, Miss Noble, that you should come when I am laid up here, and Mr Morgan is from home, but I hope you try to make yourself comfortable."

I said "I was only sorry on her account, and hoped she would soon be down stairs again."

"Well," she said, "I don't know, these attacks take me so suddenly and leave me so prostrate; you have no idea, Miss Noble,"—and I saw her look rather keenly at me, I thought, which was not surprising, considering that I was to be her right hand, and I looked at her too. So far as I could judge, for the curtains put her in deep shade, she seemed to be about forty-five, or fifty. I have no doubt she had been good-looking. The under part of her face was full and heavy, but she had a fine aquiline nose, and a good forehead still smooth and unwrinkled; her eyes were of a lightish blue, but looked *drumlie* from her recent illness; fair hair, of a very fine texture, was braided below the cap,—in the subdued light I could not make out whether it was mixed with grey yet or not. Though the room was a large one, with two windows and a fireplace, the air was close. I suggested opening a window a little bit.

"It might be a good thing," she said, "but they are not easily opened, I think."

I tried each, and found they were nailed down, and very securely nailed too. I communicated my discovery.

"Very likely," she said; "it is a whim of Mr Morgan's."

As I felt sympathy for her in her weak state, I began to show it by enquiring into the particulars of her illness.

"Well," she said, "I don't think my complaints are understood, at least, I am quite sure Dr England knows nothing about them."

"Indeed," said I. "I should have thought Dr England an able man."

"You have seen him, then; Oh yes, I recollect Mr Morgan told me. He has certainly got on Mr Morgan's weak side most thoroughly, but I think him the merest charlatan. Did he say anything to you of my ailments?"

"Nothing."

"Mr Morgan will insist upon employing him, although he is not only ignorant, but rude. I can hardly repeat what he once said to Lizzie. We had a person with us for a time, a Miss O'Shee, and he heard Lizzie speaking to her in a way which he—a good judge to be sure—thought uncivil; he told her that if he were her papa, as she was past being whipt, he would lock her in a room and feed her on bread and water till she had learnt at least to be civil! What do you think of that for a medical man?"

"He evidently does not set himself to curry favour," I said.

"And the best of it was, when I flew up indignantly, Lizzie said that she believed he was quite right; that is a girl! Miss Noble. You never know what absurdity she is to say or do next; the anxiety she has cost me is inconceivable. Oh! what I have suffered one way and another, and nobody understands me, or rather everybody misunderstands me. You have the key of the sideboard, Miss Noble?"

"Yes."

"I feel an attack of toothache coming on, I have chloroform, but there is just a shade of danger in using it; if you will go down to the sideboard and bring up a bottle of brandy; I have found a little cotton dipped in brandy settle it."

When I returned with the brandy, I said "I saw no bottle that has been opened; this will need a screw."

"Never mind a screw," she said; "just set the bottle down, unless the tooth gets worse I'll not need it. I can ring for Sarah; I'll lie down now and cover my head, warmth will perhaps cure it, and I'll likely sleep, just leave me; if I want anything I'll ring." As I shook up the pillow and put the shawl over her head, she said "I daresay you found things in a sad state, I am so seldom equal to looking after them."

I left the room, closing the door gently, and returned to my occupation, which was making

myself mistress of household details. I got interested, an hour or two passed, and I began to think I had not heard Mrs Morgan's bell. I concluded she had fallen asleep, and hoping she might be better, I went on with my business. I pondered what she had said of Dr England; I could not make out Mrs Morgan at all from this first interview. That Dr England should be thought a charlatan:—if I had been struck with any thing during the short time I had seen him, it was the total absence of sham. His speech to Miss Morgan was certainly not over courteous, but I was sure he had been irritated by seeing her ride roughshod over the hapless Miss O'Shee, and I had no doubt it was the right speech in the right place, it would not readily be forgotten. I was pleased to think that Miss Morgan had not taken her mother's view of it.

At length I went up stairs again. I listened as I passed Mrs Morgan's door, but heard no sound. I knocked very gently,—no answer; I knocked louder,—still no answer. I opened the door and went in without noise. A strong smell of brandy met me. I looked at the bed where Mrs Morgan was lying, I went close up, she made some inarticulate sound, opened her eyes for a second, and smiled idiotically. The bottle, broken off by the neck, was flung to the foot of the bed; it was empty. The bedclothes were bedropped and smeared with blood that had trickled from her hands, which were cut with the broken glass. Some brandy had been

spilt on the bed. I eagerly grasped the clothes to ascertain how much, for I feared she had taken enough to kill her. And this was the mystery! I was a fool not to have guessed it. It seemed clear as day now; and I, the "companion of firm, sensible temperament," had actually ministered to the very craving I was to be a check upon. Well, I ought to have been told.

I have seen many scenes since, but this was my first; and while standing for a minute, thinking what I would do, my eye, independently of my mind, took in every thing in that room, so that, to this day, I see it in pre-Raphaelite minuteness of detail, down to the stray slipper sticking out below the wardrobe, and a glass with the dregs of some Gregory's mixture in it standing upon a table, upon which also lay, I recollect, poor Fanny's "Tales of the Castle." Here, indeed, was the key with a vengeance to everything that was out of joint, from Miss Morgan's temper to the cracked china.

Only the servants were in the house, and I could hardly call them to see their mistress in her present state. What could I do? I was still hesitating, when I heard the house door open and shut. I went to the top of the stairs to see who came. In a minute or two, a man, whom I had not seen before, came up stairs. I looked down upon him over the banisters. His head was bald, as if a small white saucer had been turned over on it; round

the outside of this there was plenty of black hair. He looked up at a clock as he passed it. His forehead was square, his eyes were black; a good straight nose stood over lips that were redder, and shewed more of the red, than any lips I ever saw; quite a ruff of black hair went round his chin from ear to ear; his bearing was brisk and complacent. I felt this was Mr Morgan.

I hardly knew what to say. It was dreadful for a man coming home pleased, and ready to please, to have to encounter the sight in that room. When his eye fell upon me, he said, "Oh! you'll be Miss Noble, I think." I said, "Yes; Mr Morgan, I presume—the young ladies are out, and I am sorry Mrs Morgan is not so ———"

"Why, what's the matter?" He passed me into the bedroom—I followed; he looked round and cried, "Confound it all, how did she get it? but she would get it, if the devil brought it."

"It was I who brought it, Mr Morgan; Mrs Morgan asked me to bring it for her toothache."

"Toothache!" groaned Mr Morgan, and he turned on his heel, and was going down stairs, when I said, "Can nothing be done? I know nothing of what should be done."

"Done!" he said; "hang it. I'm going into town, I'll send out the doctor."

The door shut with a bang that echoed again. Mr Morgan was in a passion of anger. I thought if I had been he, I would have felt grieved, humiliated, struck dumb; but I excused

him—this was likely not the first nor the fiftieth time he had seen his wife in that state: he must have passed through every gradation of feeling.

In a very short time some one came in. It was Dr England. I was glad that it was not one of the family returned. He shook hands with me without speaking, looked at the mass on the bed, and said, "The old thing."

"Will she die?" I said.

"Die! No, that may be the end of it some day though, but not now. She has a wholesome dread of killing herself; that is the one only thing that keeps her within bounds."

"Bounds!" I said, "that bottle was full and it's empty now."

"But she has not drunk it all, she has spilt some, and," he said, feeling under the pillows and bringing out a small medicine bottle with brandy in it, "she has kept some for the morning horrors."

All this was so new to me that I shook and shivered as from cold. I wondered if it was to be my duty to wait by the side of this loathsome looking woman, and watch her through such a disgusting illness; not that I did not pity her too,—truly she was a pitiable object. I asked the doctor if I was expected to do this.

"No, no," said he, "a woman will be here in a little who'll stay till this fit is over, and then it will be your business, I fancy, to prevent all smuggling."

"I wish I may be sharp enough for that kind

of business. When I look back on it, it seems as if a child might have guessed the nature of Mrs Morgan's attacks, yet I did not. I gave her the brandy."

"You did?"

"Yes, she asked it for toothache."

The doctor smiled grimly. "You will agree with me," he said, "that your post is not a sinecure; do you regret taking it?"

"If I had known this, I wouldn't have taken it, but as I am here, I'll stay; I feel interested."

"Interested! In whom—in her?" and he pointed to the bed.

"Well, yes, even in her; it would be a grand thing if she could be cured of such a habit."

"Grand indeed," said the doctor, smiling at the gleam of enthusiasm my words betrayed; "it's worth trying; I won't discourage you; she'll be fully more interesting when cured, than even now: but who else interests you?"

"Miss Morgan does."

"Why?"

"She is beautiful."

"Humph, what's beauty; a few days of disease, a few years, at most, and what's beauty?"

"Quite so," I said; "one wonders why it should be at all; red hair, a broad snub nose, and a squint, are all that the eye can desire."

"Ah," said the doctor, and we stood silent, looking at Mrs Morgan, who, with as much expression as an idiot, and her cap all awry, lay moving and muttering what I could not make out.

Shortly, the woman who was to nurse the patient came. She was a respectable-looking, elderly woman, and seemed quite at home. After the doctor had given his directions, he went into the drawing-room for a little, and I said to him, "I hope this new attendant has a 'firm, sensible temperament.' She will need it."

"The nurse? Yes, she is thoroughly up to cases of that kind. It's not the first time she has been here. How many similar patients do you suppose I have in this suburb, Miss Noble?"

"Women who drink!" I said. "Not many, surely."

"Eleven fall to my share, in this little corner of L——."

"That's appalling!" I said. "And are you a total abstainer?"

"No, why should I?"

"Well, neither was I last night, but I am now; my conversion was instantaneous; as I stood alone beside Mrs Morgan—of course there's no logic in it, its vastly silly and womanish."

"There's no harm in it, but I can't see because one man makes a beast of himself that I should abstain from what may be, and is, a benefit to me; so you are interested in Miss Morgan?"

"She is clever, and foolish, and wilful."

"Certainly, if these are interesting qualities, she is profoundly interesting. I hope she will not be as impertinent to you, as she was to your predecessor."

"I shall not allow impertinence to me," I said quietly.

"That's what she wants," said he, "some one to be head over her; you may do a world of good in this house, Miss Noble. What all have you to do? To put the household machinery in order, to make and keep Mrs Morgan a teetotaler, to train the daughters, to make a cheerful home for father and sons, to forget yourself,—if you succeed in any of these trifling undertakings, you will be well worth sixty per annum."

He looked at his watch, and went away, saying, he would call again in the evening.

I stood by the drawing-room fire, and meditated for a little. Truly I had made a remarkable change from the quiet, even tenor of life under Mr Acroyd's roof, to this Honeycomb House, where such a crop of good and evil was growing together, like the tares and wheat of the parable, to maturity. But here I was, certainly not by blind chance; and though I cannot say that I did not shrink from it, I determined to remain, and do what I could—little enough as that would probably be. Towards the dinner hour, the family began to drop in. I did not see any of them (in truth, I kept out of the way) till we all met in the dining-room, and then, by the look and demeanour of each, I knew that the shadow had fallen upon them.

John had brought a friend and fellow-student to dine and spend the evening. He enquired diligently for Mrs Morgan, hoped her illness was not serious, &c. I think every one present must

have wished him a hundred miles off, but to his eye, I have no doubt, we all seemed in a very joyous, happy mood. Fanny slipped from the room as soon as possible; and sometime afterwards, in going up stairs, I found her in her own room in the dark, sobbing as if her heart would break. I tried to console her, but she said, "Oh, what will become of poor mamma!" Poor little thing, I succeeded in soothing her a little, and staid with her till she went to bed, and lost in the sleep of childhood the sense of her misery.

On going down, I found them assembled in the drawing-room. Lizzie was playing an accompaniment on the piano to the voices of herself and the three young men. I thought they did well, but, of course, I was no judge of music. I took my knitting, and sat down by the table; Mr Morgan was lying back in an arm-chair near the fire, his eyes half shut, to all appearance enjoying the music. Turning to me, he said, "What think you of Lizzie's playing, Miss Noble?"

I said, "I thought it very good, indeed."

"She is good at most things. I have spared no expense; they have all had the best schooling to be had for money. I am not what is called an educated man, Miss Noble, but I can see the good of it for all that: anything I learned, I picked up at my own hand, for when I came to L—— thirty years ago, now—how time runs—I hadn't a friend in it; I had only some half-a-crown in my pocket, but I have done pretty

well. Yes, I think I may say I have done pretty well. By the way, if there's anything you think should be replaced, or altered about the house, get it done; make things comfortable, and look after yourself." I said "I would use my discretion, and do what I could."

"You would think me short this forenoon," continued Mr Morgan, "but the fact is, a man gets irritated at times. I told England not to let you know," and he lowered his voice, "all about Mrs Morgan; I had promised her this, to give her another chance."

The music stopped, and he stopped. It began again; they were fairly into the spirit of it, and I daresay had forgotten for a moment the unpleasant skeleton in the upstairs chamber. Mr Morgan again leant back on his chair, and I wondered how I came to be there, mixed up in the family life and secrets of people of whose existence only a week or two ago I had not even been aware.

During a lull of the music, I thought I heard a fumbling outside the door, and in a moment the door flew open with force, and Mrs Morgan entered in her night-dress! I think, as the saying is, any one of us might at that moment have been bound with a straw. Such a dreary, bleary, idiotical face I had not before seen. She managed with difficulty to get the length of the table, of which she took hold with tipsy gravity, and in tipsy dialect declared that we were speaking of her, we were "bla—acking her cat—er. She drink! she was ill, had taken the wrong medicine,

but people in this house would sing if she were in her grave!" Our visitor looked the other way, and turned over some sheets of music; Lizzie bent her head over the piano; John looked at his father; David was red, confused, fierce; Mr Morgan turned half round in his chair, with an expression on his face I had no wish to translate, and said, "Take that woman away."

John went forward, took his mother in his arms, and by main force carried her from the room. I thought our visitor would leave immediately, but with considerable delicacy, he said, as if there had been no interruption, "Miss Morgan, would you play this for me," and he put a sheet of music before her. She began mechanically enough, I daresay.

I left the room for a little, and when I returned, the effects of the housequake seemed to have subsided. The young people drank wine. Mr Morgan, vulgar like myself, mixed toddy, and sent me a glass. I didn't taste it, but I felt it was hardly the time or season for upholding my new views. I thought that would be showing a want of consideration for their feelings. However, I was thoroughly convinced that if I was to benefit Mrs Morgan, my first step was to abstain; I can't say it was no sacrifice; I had often felt myself "set up" by a glass of wine, and I had no fear of becoming a drunkard, but how was that unhappy woman to be kept from stumbling if she was to be constantly exposed to temptation without a single prop? I saw clearly what was my

duty, I hoped that others might, in time, come to see what I thought to be theirs.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT night, after I had gone up stairs, Miss Morgan came into my room, and throwing herself on a chair, burst forth—

“I declare, Miss Noble, I’ll believe you hard up if you mean to stay here. I think if I had twelve shillings a-week and anybody to speak to, I would go away myself.”

“You would soon come back again,” I said.

“Is it not awful to be vexed and affronted as we are; this has been going on for years; since ever I remember, mamma has had violent and sudden illnesses; of course I didn’t know the meaning of them, then. Not a creature comes near us now, at which I don’t wonder, and we go nowhere; papa will be like a bear for weeks, John will shut himself in his own room, David will stay mostly in town, Fanny will mope and cry; cheerful, isn’t it?”

“You don’t make the picture brighter than it is. You might say, a kind father and brothers, a loving, gentle sister, a good home.”

“Oh, I might say that—if I were you I would say it; it’s easy speaking when you are not connected with it, nor tied to it.”

“But I am going to tie myself to it, I might

as you say leave to-morrow, but I mean to stay; I may not do much good, but I'll try."

"Aye, you may try," she said bitterly, "we may all try."

"Is that some one coming in?"

"It's Dr England, he visits often enough when he's sent for, and we have another visitor, Dr M'Andrew, our minister; papa is wealthy and liberal, and he visits us."

"Do you suppose he would not visit you if you were poor?"

"I don't know, I never was poor, but Mrs M'Andrew does not visit us; she sometimes asks me to visit her,—I don't like Dr England."

"Why?"

"Chiefly because he does not like me; to think of the absurdity of Miss O'Shee's falling in love with him—poor body, I wonder what she's about now."

"Very likely it was only your notion."

"Not at all; if she had been here instead of you, now, she would have been out upon the landing, ready to catch him as he went up or down."

"You might think so, but I daresay she was not so foolish."

"You need not believe it unless you like—there, he's away again; well, I'll go to bed, it's a mercy one can always sleep."

Here was this pretty girl, barely seventeen, unconsciously echoing the bitter maxim of the Frenchman, that life is a malady, relieved once in the twenty-four hours by sleep—it was pitiful.

My conversion to total abstinence was sudden, as far as it went, but that was not far. It would have occurred before, if I had chanced to be in any way connected with a drunkard; I was so now; and I meant to be a total abstainer while that connexion continued. Mrs Morgan got surprisingly soon well, and when she made her first appearance at dinner, I confess, I felt it a matter of delicacy to look at her, I thought she would feel so humbled and ashamed; but, whoever there present felt ashamed, she showed no symptoms of it; she was thoroughly *nonchalante*; I can't say but that I felt amused,—such amusement as it was—at the picture I had drawn of her, ready to drop through the floor when she encountered her family, after such a deplorable exhibition as she had made of herself. I was something more than amused,—I was shocked when she said to me in the course of the evening that her only surprise was, that the mistake she had made in taking the wrong medicine, a few evenings before, had not been fatal.

“I have always been in the habit of walking in my sleep,” she said; “a dangerous thing it is; it certainly is a very awkward thing, to get out of bed, and walk into a well-lighted room, full of people; but I do believe, Miss Noble, if I had not been roused in that way, it would have cost me my life. I know Dr England does not take my view of the case, but he is a man in whom I have no confidence, and really I would as soon have no doctor at all, as one in

whom I had not every confidence; why, faith is often half the cure."

I said, "It was very true, but there were some lengths to which even faith could not go."

I wondered if she expected that I was to believe this explanation of her late severe illness.

Gradually, as far as household matters were concerned, things shook themselves into shape. I got new servants, worthy women, who knew their work, and did it. Everything assumed a comfortable, well-cared-for aspect, and our meals reached Mrs Gamp's humble pitch of expectation, "they were of the best, well cooked, and served to a minute." I had been reading the memoirs of the inimitable "Sairey" just before coming to Honeycomb House, and I had not been long there when I often said to myself, "Leave the bottle on the chimbley-piece, and let me put my lips to it when I am disposed." My prime duty was exactly to see that the bottle was *not* left on the "chimbley-piece."

When Mr Morgan paid me my first quarter's salary, he took occasion to compliment me on my good management of household matters, thanked me for the evident interest I took in his family, and said that Mrs Morgan had benefited much by my society, and he was quite happy that I got on so well with his daughter Lizzie. You are to observe, reader, that Mrs Morgan never went out, or I should say, got out, without me—I was her double, and I daresay she

liked me about as well as William Wilson liked his. I can only say the post of "doppelganger" is no joke. If she bought anything, I paid for it. She was not trusted with money. This must have been desperately galling to her. I often wondered she stood it as she did, for you are not to understand that she was one of that class of drunkards who are said to be nobody's enemy but their own. I have been told that in early life she was very fascinating and agreeable, indeed she could be so still, if she had a purpose to serve; but the truth is, the ever-recurring indulgence of the base craving that possessed her, had gone near to killing anything that was good in her, as weeds left to riot in the most choice garden bed will choke every sweet, honest flower in it. Let no one think to cultivate and indulge in any sin, and expect to lay it down (if he ever does) the same man that he was when he took it up; his whole nature will have partaken of the base alloy, and what fires of effort and remorse will purge it out, it is not for me to say.

Miss Morgan took her way to town, almost every day, in the omnibus. Mrs. Morgan was astonished she should go so often into omnibuses. "You are always," she said, "meeting with people smelling with drink in them. I don't mind so much the smell of fresh drink, but the smell of stale drink is most oppressive and disagreeable."

I said, "What did she mean by stale drink? for I neither knew it, nor its smell."

"Oh, she meant the smell of people who were sober, but had been drinking. Of all smells, preserve her from the smell of stale drink. By the way, they told her that a very good-looking man conducted one of these omnibuses."

"Who tells you, mamma?" said Lizzie, sharply.

"You have told me for one. I have heard the servant, Sarah, speak of him too."

"She might save herself the trouble," said Miss Morgan, still more sharply.

"Any of the men, that I have seen, are well enough," I said. "I never picked out one in particular."

"No, I daresay not," said Lizzie, "nor any other lady."

Wine was regularly set on the dinner-table; and wine and spirits always came in with the supper tray at night. Being cold weather, most of them liked to take one or other, before going to bed. Fanny and I were the only abstainers. I think John and Lizzie speculated on my change of practice. I had become a total abstainer from pity for Mrs Morgan, and I thought that for that reason they ought all to do the same. Often had I been on the verge of talking the matter over with Mr Morgan, but a feeling of timidity restrained me. I had been a stranger so recently, and, comparatively, was so young, besides, they must know all the arguments in favour of it as well as I did (in fact, I did not know them at all), and if pity moved me it must be a still stronger power with them. But I was

sure that one day or other, Mr Morgan and I must have a "turn up" on this subject; so, in order that my armour might be bright and polished, I saturated myself with total abstinence literature and seized one or two opportunities which I had of hearing some of its most eloquent advocates. It was not a very difficult business to convince my reasoning powers—my feelings were convinced already—for, you see, I was a woman, and a woman of a kind not very difficult to lead by the nose. But when I thought of Mr Morgan,—of his square formation of head, denoting caution and obstinacy; of his bright ruddy lips, with the self-complacent smile; of the money in his pocket which he had made himself; of his want of mental training, no bar it seemed in the way of making money, but a very sufficient obstacle to his seeing the point of an argument, as I had found often enough, I despaired of making him a convert. I forget whether at this time I was romantic enough to suppose that the money interests he had at stake would not weigh with him, or whether I took these in also, as increasing the hopelessness of the case.

The first time I caught myself giving a total abstinence lecture, was on this wise. We had all gone up stairs to bed, and I found I must go down again for something I had forgotten. When I went into the sitting-room we had left, I found Sarah busy turning the left contents of one glass after another over her throat, with what appeared considerable relish and dexterity.

I said, "Sarah, Sarah, that will never do."

She said, "Ma'am?"

I replied, "I think you would be better without half cold toddy."

She said, "I would have to throw it out; it's a pity to waste it."

"Nobody likes waste of any kind worse than I do, but better it should be wasted than you. You may learn a bad habit."

"Is it a bad habit?" she said; "the young ladies take it; it makes a body comfortable on a cold night."

"Miss Fanny does not take it, and I don't, I never taste it, and we both feel as comfortable as can be; young healthy people have no need of it; and besides, you may learn to like it too well. Nobody ever learned to drink to excess in one night; just a little, and then a little more, till they can't want it, or won't."

Sarah knew as well as I did the state her mistress had been in, but of course I could not hold Mrs Morgan up before her servant's eyes as a beacon.

"And supposing, Sarah," I continued, "that you don't learn to take too much, when you get a house of your own, which I don't doubt you look forward to," (here she blushed and half giggled, as girls do at such allusions,) "you will find a glass of toddy every cold night rather an expensive affair; your husband would need one too. The money would get far more comfort laid out in other ways, in which there is no risk of going wrong."

Sarah was roused, and in her native Doric, said, "But what way should we dae wrang; we're nae mair likely tae dae wrang than ither folk."

"Not a bit more," I said, "but at least as much so, and it's well to be on the safe side, and there is nothing so safe for a young tradesman as to be a total abstainer."

"But Tammas disna drink," she said, missing the point of what I had been saying, and again butting up against the one side of the thing that presented itself to her. "Naeboddy ever laid that till him; I never saw speerits on him but ance."

"Well, it was once too often, and a very strong reason for urging him to become a total abstainer. Try your influence, Sarah; you'll not regret it, take my word for it."

"Weel, weel, Mem, I'll speak tae him, but I dinna see what way puir folks should want their comforts, if they can wun at them, mair than rich folk."

"Now, Sarah, don't misunderstand me. I daresay there is nobody but would wish the poor every comfort, but is it a comfort, or even a necessary, that young healthy persons should drink spirits? I make no distinction between rich and poor in the case. If a rich man destroys himself by drinking, his riches will not avail him, and if a poor man destroys himself by drinking, his poverty will not excuse him; if you can't see that, I hope Thomas will."

"Tammas disna need to be a teetotaler, he's no gien tae drinking."

Now, Sarah was not at all a dunce. This was precisely Mr Morgan's style of argument; both set down their fact, and you might go round it and round it, blowing trumpets till it fell, like the walls of Jericho, and, lo! they just stuck it in before you, as firm as ever.

CHAPTER V.

WE went to St. Murdoch's Parish Church, the minister of which was Dr M'Andrew. On the Saturday previous to my first Sunday at Honeycomb House, Miss Morgan told me that she had to get up a little earlier than usual on Sunday mornings. I asked the reason.

"To be in time for my class in the Sunday school," she said. I must have unconsciously looked a little surprised, for she said, "I knew that would make you open your eyes. Don't hide your opinion of me. You think I'm a good-for-nothing."

"I think nothing of the kind, but I confess that I did not think your energies would take that direction."

"Well," she said, "they do; and more than that, I am a very successful teacher." She said this somewhat satirically, and her colour rose. "The superintendent comes round and says,

'Miss Morgan, your class keeps up remarkably well, I see you have the knack of interesting them, and you must visit well too.' The truth is, mine is a class of children, from five to seven years old, and the little creatures have no choice; their mothers—good women—turn them out whether they will or no, and I drill them upon 'Who made you?' 'What were you made of?' &c. By the by, when I asked them that last question lately, they all shouted the usual 'Of dust.' I took hold of one of the little fat warm hands and said, 'Do you mean to tell me that this is dust? Now, in your own words, tell me what this is made of?' 'O' bluid and banes,' cried a little urchin."

"Well, if you continue that style, you may turn out a good teacher," I said.

"I don't like it. I wish to wash my hands of it; but papa wishes me to go, and Dr M'Andrew thinks me very highly qualified indeed. You see he is a discerning man. David has a class too, and John superintends an evening school, but, of course, it is in his way. Papa gives very largely to all religious and benevolent schemes, and every Sunday we fill a pew in the front gallery, and fill it well. We look highly respectable, and even genteel; that's a word I dote upon, although Miss O'Shee wouldn't allow it. I have an idea that your presence will heighten the picture. Now, I think I have said enough to prepare you for to-morrow's duties."

And she went off before I had time to speak

again. Really, the twist this young girl's mind had got was painful to think of—very painful.

The winter months passed quietly enough. As Miss Morgan had said, we had few visitors. After his late experience, sometimes John brought out a friend with him, but not often. Several times Mr Morgan had a dinner party, entirely composed of gentlemen, people with whom, I suppose, he was connected in business; and occasionally the young people went to an evening party. More frequently they went to evening concerts, and sometimes I accompanied them. The characters of this family gradually unfolded themselves to me. Of them all, John was the one in whom I had most pleasure; or, at least, the pleasure I had in him seemed the most satisfactory and secure. I never supposed he would be a brilliant preacher, but I thought he would be an efficient minister of a parish. He was conscientious. I don't call him a well-meaning man, for that implies the idea of incapacity,—he both meant well, and was able to carry out his meaning. He was very kindly and amiable, and when he expressed sympathy he left the impression that he really felt, and that it was not mere words, although the words in which he did express it might not be very numerous. I understood that it would not be long till he was licensed to preach, and that he had the prospect of soon getting a parish. Time did not bring me much closer to David Morgan. His aim seemed to be to live decently, attend to

his business, and make money, and he succeeded. I may as well admit, that I did not make much of Miss Morgan. I kept her in check, and she tamed down a little; but there was no very striking reformation. Her foolishness was not like the folly of other girls of her age I had known. I was sure wherever she was seen she would be admired, for I was not of Dr England's stoical opinion that beauty is nothing, and yet incense of this kind did not go to her head in the least. Often as she came into my room at night to brush her hair, and have a "crack," which went off in any direction, as the whim struck her, there were no silly love confidences about "young gentlemen" she had met—that darling theme of school girls. Admiration did not stick to her; I don't believe she valued it. I think if she had had her own good opinion, she would have valued that more than any other person's. I thought if I had been a man, and she had fallen in love with me, I could have moulded her into a very perfect woman. If such a man as Dr England were to take her in hand, for instance; but we saw little of the doctor, now that we did not need him professionally. Sometimes he would drop in of an evening, and it once crossed my mind that the doctor felt at least as much interest in Miss Morgan as I did; it might be a womanish fancy, but I thought so, for if he and I chanced to converse apart, our topic somehow seemed to be always Miss Morgan, and it was on an occasion of this kind that I dropped

the remark as to how I thought she might best be moulded.

"It would be the taming of the shrew over again," said the doctor.

"Well," I said, "I think the shrew is worth taming, and if the happy man who undertakes the operation has been trained in the modern faith about mothers-in-law, he will find one all his fancy could possibly paint her." The doctor laughed heartily. He seemed to me a man always ready to pick up enjoyment. I had the impression that he was a man who frequented society much. I would have characterized him as "jolly." He had a special enjoyment of nooks and angles, and there was an easy *abandon* about him that was infectious; consequently, I was surprised when John Morgan told me that he was a hard student, and that not only had he already made himself a good name in his profession, but that he was an ardent enthusiast in chemistry. In that case, thought I, he has no need to add to his labours the taming of shrews.

So I wondered what would be the ultimate fate of Lizzie. That she would have a fate I was sure,—she was not made to crawl between two cabbage leaves like a snail, and ensconcing herself on the leafiest one, there nibble out existence; but certainly, sharp as I sometimes thought myself, no inkling of the fate that she was quietly shaping for herself for an instant gleamed upon me. Miss Morgan appeared to me to take her qualities neither from her father

nor her mother, and I thought she must have had a grandmother, or great-grandmother, who had been a *character*, so I asked her one night, when she settled in my room in an arm-chair, if she remembered any of her grand-parents?"

"Now," she said, "Miss O'Shee would never have asked that; she was quite certain that we never had any grand-parents. Well, if we had, I don't remember them; I know nothing about them. Mamma's friends, as I told you, all left the country years ago. But I'll tell you what I have, Miss Noble, I have an aunt well worthy of your knowing—a sister of papa's, the only relation that he has, that I know of. She visited us once during the reign of the illustrious Miss O'Shee, and gave the final touch to that lady's opinion of us."

"Is she peculiar?" I said.

"A little," she replied with a laugh; "she is older than papa. I think she was a servant (and a non-such she must have been,) for a number of years. But now she has a small house of her own and lets lodgings. Papa would be very glad to help her, but she won't take anything. She says his money is the wages of iniquity, and she would not get a blessing with it. Did you ever hear anything so outrageous, as if papa were responsible for all the wretches who will drink too much? Well, that's the bee in her bonnet; but, apart from that, she is quite an original, and very entertaining. I would ask her to come just to amuse you, but I don't think she would come.

Whether would you, Miss Noble, marry a man with brains and no education, or with education and no brains?"

"Decidedly, I wouldn't marry either."

"But if you were compelled?"

"I can't imagine a case that couldn't happen."

"Well, *impelled* then," she said.

"As far as I know myself, I don't think I would allow myself to do a foolish thing. But what do you mean by 'no education'? Any man, in these days, with any force of brain at all, educates himself."

"Just what I think; of course he may be no classical scholar, but if he can read and write correctly,"—

I laughed. "I think you should give him arithmetic too," I said.

"Well, if he can do these there is no fear of his getting on. You think so, Miss Noble?"

"If you are quite sure he *has* brains, but if he has only the three R's., he starts for the winning-post with an immense number of competitors. Do any of your friends propose to marry brains, and brains alone? for I think they should take advice; have the quality of the brains tested."

"My young friends,—the girls at the music classes you mean,—don't be afraid, they know better, the first thing they canvass about any man is—What's his income?"

"Indeed, they are prematurely wise. Well, a young lady, such as you, for instance, would be a bad bargain for a poor man, and I can't

suppose, if he had the brains you speak of, he would think of it for a moment."

"You think so. Well, perhaps; my aunt, who is pointed and proverbial, says that people should marry for love and work for money."

"She is quite right, so far. The use of a proverb is to give a strong, pithy view of one side of a case. It needs its companion proverb to balance it, as 'When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window.' The truth lies between the two."

CHAPTER VI.

THE month of March had come round, and I was still keeping a vigilant eye on Mrs Morgan.

I was quite aware that I had defeated various plans of hers for getting a supply of drink, so that she had been longer sober than had been the case for some time. Mr Morgan fondly believed in a reformation begun, and John and Fanny, upon whom their mother's conduct seemed to weigh most, really were in good spirits. A general talk and discussion began about summer quarters. It was their custom, it seemed, to go to the country for four or five months every year, and the early fine weather we had that season, set them thinking of it sooner than usual. With this kind of flitting in view, Mrs Morgan said to me one day, that

she wished to dispose of some gowns that were past wearing; would I sell them to the first old clothes man that called? I said selling old clothes was quite new to me. I had been in the habit of giving them away to people to whom they might be useful. That, she said, was a very admirable plan, but what she had were not fitting things for the poor,—old silks and such like; however, she added,

“I'll sell them myself, as I daresay you don't care for the commission.”

That same forenoon an old clothes man was ushered into the back parlour, and Mrs Morgan descended, Sarah bearing behind her an armful of faded grandeur. I saw the gowns, four of them, spread out and examined. They were somewhat the worse of the wear, but none of them had undergone that magic process called turning, by which ladies fondly persuade themselves that an old gown is made to look as well as new. The cook came for orders about the dinner, and I had to leave the room for a few minutes. When I came back I found Mrs Morgan concluding the sale of the four gowns for ten shillings. It struck me it was a bargain, not like her usual sharp dealings, for if they were worth anything they were worth a great deal more than that. However, I was inexperienced in the business, and if the seller and buyer were pleased, it was no matter of mine. When the man turned out his capital, it was found to amount to only eight shillings, so he said he would return with the money and get

the articles in the afternoon. I remarked to Mrs Morgan that I thought she had sold her wares cheap.

"Well, perhaps she had, but they were of no earthly use to her, and she did not like to be hard on the poor man;" indeed, she seemed remarkably well pleased with the transaction.

According to appointment, back came the man in the afternoon. Mrs Morgan was sitting in the parlour; the shawl she commonly wore was flung over a chair. The man had a big bag, in which were some old hats he had bought; he laid the bag on the floor near Mrs Morgan, took out the hats, put in the dresses, then the hats above them, then laid the ten shillings on the table, and went away, saying he would be glad to do business here again, and would not forget to call.

Mrs Morgan told me to put the money in my purse. I left the room, and shortly after I met her at the head of the stairs, wearing her shawl as usual. At dinner she was in great spirits, and there was a kind of lurking triumph in her manner towards me, which made me say to myself, "What can be in the wind now?" Accustomed as I was to her moods and tenses. I could not account for it.

Immediately after dinner she went to her own room. When we gathered for tea—and of late it had been a very pleasing meal indeed—Mrs Morgan had not come down, and Sarah was despatched to let her know that it was ready. I was just passing the door to take my seat

when she entered. I thought she did not look quite herself, but I was convinced of it when she threw her arms round my neck and declared I was "a treasure—oh, in a worl' like this, a perfect treasure." Her breath exhaled of the strongest peppermint, superinduced upon what certainly was not "stale" drink. I disengaged myself as quickly as I could, and said, "Take a seat, Mrs Morgan, and allow me to make tea."

I handed her a cup of very strong tea; she looked at the cup with desperate gravity, and said—

"I won'er, now, if this is made of paper."

Lizzie said quickly, "Drink the tea, mamma, and consider that after."

"Oh," she went on, "it's a won'ful age, extraordinary age."

Nobody said anything, but went through the meal impassively. I saw the tears dropping into Fanny's cup. The tea acted as a sedative on Mrs Morgan, and in a short time she leaned back on her chair and fell asleep.

Miss Morgan said to me, "Have you the least guess how she got it?"

I said, "I feel almost sure that the old-clothes man who was here to-day must have brought it."

I felt the surer of this, the more I thought of it. This supposition explained all the circumstances, and accounted for the cheap rate the goods had gone at, which was so unlike the keen bargain-hunting nature of the woman.

"Then," said Miss Morgan, "there is likely a further supply, but we'll see." She took Mrs

Morgan's keys from her pocket, and we went up stairs together and searched every nook and cranny where it was possible a bottle of any kind could be hidden, but we discovered nothing. I was satisfied there was nothing. Not so Miss Morgan.

"If the man brought any," she said, "he must have brought more than she has taken yet, but where it can be is a mystery to me." Though we repeated the search, we made nothing of it.

Mr Morgan was in the habit of taking a walk in the morning; and in the interval between his going out and breakfast time, Mrs Morgan got herself into a state of helpless intoxication—dead drunk, in fact. Dr England had to be sent for, and the nurse, skilled in such cases, was reinstated.

The next day was the Sabbath. I went to church in the morning with the family; but in the evening I remained at home, and sent the three servants to church, so that there were in the house only myself and the nurse, who kept beside the patient. I went up stairs to see how they were getting on. Mrs. Morgan was sitting in bed, her eyes had a glassy look, and were rolling wildly. She was clutching at the bed-clothes with her hands, and crying,

"Give me brandy; give me it! For God's sake give me it, or I'll die; just one glass, one glass, and I'll not ask any more. Don't you see them? Oh, mercy! there they are," and she pointed to a corner of the bed. Her eye

fell on me, standing near the door. "Miss Noble," she said, suddenly controlling herself, "I have been dreadfully ill. A glass of brandy would do me a world of good. Get it, will you? Oh!" she screamed again, "there they are; give me brandy, or I'll die."

I turned, and left the room. I was doing no good there. The nurse knew best whether to give her brandy or not, and the sight and the sounds gave me a sick all-overish feeling I cannot describe.

I went down and opened the front door to breathe the fresh air (as I have said, the weather was unusually fine, considering it was only the month of March). The gloaming was coming on; it was a mild, still night. The thick belting of shrubbery that went round the house was taking the dark eerie look that evergreens have towards nightfall. I went down the steps, and moved slowly round to the end of the house. I stood, letting the slight breath of air there was blow about my face, and contrasting the deep quietness and the fragrance of the opening spring with the room and scene I had just left. I was roused from my brown study by a low peculiar whistle from the shrubbery near. I stood perfectly still. I heard no movement. Yet, as it seemed to me, considerably nearer, a voice said, in low coaxing tones, "Lizzie! Lizzie!" I said, "Who wants Miss Morgan?" There was no answer and no movement, though I waited for a time. "Now," I thought, "whoever it is, must either go out at

the gate, or climb the high walls. If I go to the top of the front-door steps, although it is getting dark, I may manage to see who goes."

I took my post, and held my breath. Not a soul stirred. I waited what seemed to me a long time, but not more than ten minutes, perhaps, when all of a sudden the back-door bell rang with a violence that made me jump. I went in, shut the front door carefully, went along the passages, and putting the chain on the back door, opened it; not a creature was to be seen or heard. I was puzzled. Opening the door fully, I went out. If the voice—a man's, without doubt—had asked for Sarah, or one of the other servants, I would have thought nothing; but to ask so familiarly for Miss Morgan; could he be the ideal uneducated man with brains? But I said again, no man with brains, even if he didn't know the A B C, would come hovering round a house, when there were fifty chances to one that he might be detected, and when he had endless opportunities of seeing Miss Morgan otherwise. Still it must have been somebody expecting to see Miss Morgan. He had probably watched the family and servants go out, and not being aware of my presence, had naturally enough supposed that I must be Miss Morgan, for Lizzie had not gone out with the rest. She had gone home in the afternoon with Mrs M'Andrew, and was to accompany her to church in the evening. Was it possible that Miss Morgan could so far forget herself? I knew her to be very foolish

and wilful, with crude, unpruned ideas about most things, but anything so humbling as this I was not prepared for. I thought of the wretched woman up stairs, and what she had to answer for,—lost to every duty in her own selfish and degrading infatuation. I conned the whole thing over and over and over.

Should I tell Mr Morgan? I shrunk from that; his pride in Lizzie was as great as it was natural. Or her brother John? but I thought it would put him past making the sermons he was busy with, and had to have ready within a given time. Finally, I resolved in the first instance to speak of it to Lizzie herself; I could at least depend on her thorough truthfulness.

My thoughts were still hovering over the mystery when I heard the gate creak, and they all came in,—Dr England with them. I thought for an instant “how would it do to tell him?” I was inclined to rely more on his judgment than on that either of Mr Morgan or his son. But, after all, this was rather a delicate matter to expose, even to his gaze, so I came back to my resolution to appeal to Lizzie for information.

Dr England was leading Fanny by the hand. He certainly was fond of that child. She generally avoided him, “for,” she said, “Miss Noble, I feel so ashamed that he should be so often sent for to see mamma in that dreadful state,” but he generally found her out in her corner and dropped some words of encourage-

ment. She was a very sweet child, gentle and unselfish, and much given to pore over books—any or all books that came in her way. Dr England had once taken her into his laboratory and shown her some simple experiments. This she always looked back to as indeed a red letter day, and often said, “I wish he would do it again.” I would say, “Ask him.” “Not for anything,” she said; “I could never think of it.” He stayed a very short time this evening, only a few minutes after seeing his patient, whose state seemed more satisfactory now. Sarah came to me in a little, and said Betsy (the housemaid) had sent her to ask, had I removed the spoons and forks, for they were not where she had left them in the pantry?

“That’s curious,” I said, and went down stairs to investigate. I had not touched them, and there was no other person who could have touched them; and sure enough the spoons were gone!

I was at the head of the kitchen stairs, when I met Miss Morgan, who asked if I had taken her mamma’s watch out of the stand, as she had gone to wind it up, and it was not there! I had never touched it; Mrs Morgan had left it in its stand, on a table in the drawing-room, when she “took ill,” and there it had been till now. I went into the back parlour, thinking it might have been taken there, and, lo, the drawers of a writing-table, which only Mr Morgan used, and which he always kept locked, were open, and several papers were scattered about!

There had been a robbery; here was a complication! That the robbery was effected by the same individual who had said, "Lizzie, Lizzie!" in coaxing tones, I was sure. I asked Miss Morgan to come with me to my room; I told her the whole story exactly as it occurred. I watched her as I spoke; she listened with breathless interest, her lips slightly apart, her colour went and came. When I had done, I said, "Now, I thought of telling your father this, or your brother John, but, in the first place, I resolved to tell you."

"Well," she said, coolly, "it is trying, certainly, to have lost our spoons; the man, if man it was, likely mistook ours for the next house. I know there is a servant there called Lizzie; and he took the opportunity of the back door being open to help himself—it's not an uncommon circumstance in L——."

"Then, I had better tell Mr Morgan, and go over the house to see if anything else is amissing."

"Stop, Miss Noble," she said, as I was leaving the room, "the voice that spoke may not have belonged to the person who stole the spoons."

"It is possible," I said.

"It is most probable," she said, eagerly; "now, think, did you hear or see nothing among the bushes; there must have been two persons—a man and a woman—the woman had gone to the back of the house, and when you appeared the man spoke to warn her; that's more likely, than that such a man should be going about a decent servant? I think, Miss Noble, you had

better not say to any one that you heard the man speak; it could do no good, and might make a row."

"It might simply be the means of identifying the thief, and I shall certainly say all I know about it; why should I not?"

"Because, Miss Noble, it must not be told."

"But, why not? surely you can tell me?" I said, seeing the distress in her face.

"No, I cannot; I have only my suspicions, as you have; they may be right or wrong, but, for my sake, for mercy's sake, Miss Noble, never say that you heard that man speak."

I sat down again, "My suspicions are very painful ones," I said; "I would like to have them cleared up."

She looked at my face, and said, "What on earth do you suspect, Miss Noble?"

"I suspect," said I, "that it is some entanglement of yours; some terribly foolish love affair."

"Some love affair of mine! Oh, Miss Noble, how could you think it for a moment?"

"I can't tell you how relieved I am. I believe you heartily. I have no wish to pry into any unhappy matters; I will say nothing of the man having spoken since ——"

"That's a good, kind Miss Noble; I pray that these things may not be traced." And she gave way to a passion of tears, which I had never seen her do before.

I went down stairs, and told Mr Morgan what had taken place. He examined the drawers of

his writing-table, and found that all the money in them—twenty-three pounds some odd shillings—was gone. This, and the spoons, forks, and watch, were all that we missed. Mr Morgan took the matter lightly; told me not to annoy myself with it; "I'll give information to the police about it, and they'll look after the things; the watch I regret most," he said; "I gave it to Mrs Morgan, the day when our first boy was a year old; that's long ago;" a deep expression of pain crossed his face. "Miss Noble," he went on, "there must be no more selling of old clothes."

"Mr Morgan," I said, "perhaps you'll think me rather bold, if I should say what I have often wished to say on this subject. Do you not think that, for Mrs Morgan's sake, we should all give up the use of intoxicating drinks, and keep nothing of the kind in the house?"

"You mean well, Miss Noble; and I like people to speak out. I have been advised to that before; but I see no reason in it. Wine was given to us to cheer our hearts, just as bread is given for the staff of life. Mrs Morgan is quite as able, if she were willing, to drink in moderation as I am."

"I doubt that; or, why does she go to excess?"

"She likes it, or the effects of it, and plans to take it."

"How did she learn to take it?"

"By using it; there's no harm in liking anything, if we keep our liking in moderation."

"There are some likings more difficult to

keep in moderation than others, and some people who have far more difficulty in keeping their desires in check than others; of course, you know that perfectly. If a person has a strong propensity for stealing, for instance, you would not surely put him in a warehouse full of valuable portable articles."

"If he's determined on it, put him in a coal-pit, and he'll steal."

"He'd be less likely to do it there though, especially if he met with any kindly collier that had a knowledge of human weakness, and kept the axes, the lanterns, and the 'Davys,' out of his way; possibly the habit might die out—be starved out."

"Total abstinence, Miss Noble, won't stand being reasoned about; it's a fine thing for a lot of shallow men, and easily-carried-away women, to talk glibly about. I don't include *you*, Miss Noble; but is the whole human race to deny itself an innocent enjoyment for the sake of the worthless few? Stuff!"

"Stop a minute, Mr Morgan; the 'whole human race' is a fine phrase; and, as you say, a shallow man would enjoy it, but what does it mean? Just units, like you and me, in our own narrow spheres; and who are the worthless few? What is worthless? Not even matter, which never perishes; not even the rags the beggar sheds by the roadside; the meanest, rude outline from the hand of a great painter, even though defaced by time, is reckoned invaluable; now, however degraded, can we call any

human being worthless, when we know from what hand he came? Why, peers, princes, and nations, lay their heads together about restoring old ruins; surely, we need not think twice about denying ourselves—greatly, if it is necessary—just for the chance merely of restoring the ruins nearest us.”

“That’s a long speech for you, Miss Noble,” he said, smiling. “I never heard you come out so far before; you are very earnest, as most people are when they mount a hobby; and a hobby total abstinence is, and will be—it won’t stand reason.”

I dropped the subject. I once thought of asking him, if he were not afraid of his sons or daughters learning to overstep moderation, but I didn’t; he was so bowed down by his wife’s misconduct, that I thought it would be cruel.

I had had another search for Mrs Morgan’s supply of liquor, but in vain. The nurse got two empty bottles, and I hoped that these exhausted it—at least the patient recovered; and, in the beginning of the week, the woman left, being needed for a similar case elsewhere.

A few hours after the nurse had gone away, Mrs Morgan was again drunk. Where she kept the spirits I was determined to find out. She might have any quantity, and while the supply lasted, there could be no cure. I was searching, as I thought, in impossible places, when by chance my arm touched a gown hanging in the press of the wardrobe. I thought it swung

heavily. I felt below its folds, and, suspended from the hook, by a cord round its neck, was a bottle of brandy; below another gown, another bottle half empty. This was all. I removed them. Mrs Morgan recovered again very soon, and did not take me round the neck and kiss me. She was grievously indignant, I do not doubt. I was thoroughly convinced that there was no middle course for her—either she must wholly abstain, or she must continue a drunkard.

One is apt to feel foolish in arguing with a person on whom your words have as much effect as the water has on the feathers of a duck which is breasting the current. I have noticed the waves of the sea roll in with all the buoyancy and energy of a youth who means to take the world by storm, and looking at the mighty rock before them, say, "Now resist us if you can." A moment more and they shrink back, utterly crest-fallen, while the rock, no whit shaken, says, "You see I have not even winked; now don't you feel foolish; but you may try it again." I resolved to try it again, and as a more hopeful affair, to try it with the young people.

CHAPTER VII.

It was not very long till Mr Morgan got a house in the country, which he thought would suit; "a farm-house," he said. "A very decent

man the farmer. He has a son who is a customer of ours. The house was originally intended for a kind of jointure house for the laird's widow, so that it's larger than ordinary farm-houses. I think you will like it. The worst is, that it is rather far away, but the change will be the greater."

Honeycomb House was to be shut up. Mr Morgan and David would stay in town, and the servants were to go with us. Mrs Morgan was great upon the chapter of servants. When I had engaged them, she told me to make what bargain I thought best, and it was part of this bargain that each in turn should have a fortnight's holidays in summer, and an afternoon and evening entirely to herself every alternate week. I thought all that very reasonable indeed, but unbounded was the astonishment of Mrs Morgan when she heard of it. She did not know what the world was coming to! What next? she wondered; what, between holidays, and dressing themselves, and writing letters, their time was pretty well taken up. She didn't object to servants hearing from their friends, but since the penny post began, they did little else than write letters and answer the postman's ring; and when you asked who the letters were for, "Oh, for me, Ma'am." There's a medium in everything.

"Well, mamma," said Miss Morgan, "we never had better servants than we have just now, nor anything like them."

"Then all the ill I wish them is, that they

mayn't be spoilt." Self-indulgent people are the last to extend indulgence to others—they would exact everything, and give nothing.

Our country quarters were five hours' travelling from L——, a considerable distance in these days. Leerielaw, or Cockieleerielaw, as the girls insisted on calling it—and indeed it looked something like that fowl standing on its conspicuous eminence—was four hundred feet above the level of the sea, and was as bare-looking a habitation as ever the eye rested on, or rather didn't rest on, for you could have no sense of repose in looking at it. In the front, the house had eight windows and a door; in the back, six windows and a door; the ends stood out like portions of a dead wall, square and bare; it braved all the winds of heaven without a morsel of shelter; it had been recently whitewashed, and the stones round all the windows had been painted black. Two yards on each side of the door were enclosed, to the width of a foot, by rough sticks, stuck in crosswise, and inside these were rose-bushes, wall-flower, and thyme, the sole attempt at ornamentation. Whatever ideas of a rural, leafy, romantic seclusion might have possessed us, were effectually dispelled. When we arrived, our own servants (two of them had gone before) opened the door for us, and we entered. Everything was (I say it advisedly) painfully clean, and to an eye accustomed to draperies, and couches, and cushions, the inside of the house looked as bare as the outside. Mrs Morgan glanced round at the

sitting-room, at its bare and faded carpet; its old mahogany tables, covered with cotton damask of a blue ground, with a pattern of big white leaves; on the chimney-piece, with its row of speckled shells; and the grate, in which was placed an immense bunch of '*honesty*,' in its seeding stage; my readers know it—a round, transparent pod, like the eyes of a pair of spectacles, and said—

"What on earth was Mr Morgan thinking of when he took a place like this?"

"He was probably taken," said Lizzie, "with the cleanliness and the '*honesty*;' these are the most conspicuous attractions."

"Now," said John, "not one of you has looked out of the windows; but, go away and get off your bonnets, and let us get our hunger appeased, and then we may find out something favourable."

"I'll tell you what we'll find," said Mrs Morgan, "violent colds. Who could it be that planned this house? It's a beautiful mess; two windows at each end of the room; cross lights, and a perpetual draught."

"Never mind, mother; you'll see we'll all come out alive, and the better for it."

I was somewhat surprised, too, at Mr Morgan's choice of a country residence. I thought it likely that it would be let on very moderate terms, but *that*, I knew, would not be his motive. He never spared money for the comfort of his family; and he liked to make a show. I guessed afterwards, and correctly, that what

he liked best about Leerielaw was, that it was three miles from any place where spirits could be bought. Poor man, his practice, in this instance, was a little different from his theory.

When we came together in the sitting-room again, the table was laid out in tempting array. I don't need to say, as story books are wont, that the cloth was coarse, but clean; it was of the finest, and glittered like snow beneath the sun; linen spun and bleached by the mother of the mistress of the house, as she afterwards told me. A pair of roast fowls, that had laid down their lives, on the very threshold of manhood, or more correctly, cockhood; eggs of the freshest, the richest butter, and the thickest cream, together with home-baked bread of various kinds, mollified even Mrs Morgan. That lady always ate sparingly; but when she met with anything that pleased her taste more than usual, her evident satisfaction was almost childish.

"Now, that egg, John," she said, "you can't get eggs like that in town, nor, indeed, in many places in the country; see, the white is curdled, and the flavour is so rich and delicate."

"Very well, mother, I am glad you like it."

"We'll get along, mamma, even here," said Lizzie; "that butter is enough of itself to make life endurable; and Fanny will grow fat on the cream; how the little creature dips her whiskers in it!"

"Oh, Lizzie, don't speak as if I were a cat; I daresay you like cream, too."

Tea was brought up in an earthenware tea-

pot, and even that Mrs Morgan genially approved of.

"Really," she said, "they may do as they like, but tea is never better, nor half so good, as out of a brown, earthenware tea-pot."

"That," said John, "is a luxury we could command at home; we don't need to come to Leerielaw for that, surely."

"I suspect we do," I said; "we can't put a long journey and mountain air into the tea-pot at home."

"Mountain air," said Fanny; "where are the mountains?"

"Come here, ladies," said her brother, going to the back window, "and allow me to introduce you to the Leerie mountains."

"Oh, is that their name?" said Fanny.

"To be sure, what else?"

"And that loch," said she, "if it is a loch, what do they call it?"

"Leerie's loch," he said; "and do you see that chasm at the foot of the hill, just near the water's edge? Well, that's called 'Leerie's loup.' The legend is, that an unfortunate lighter of lamps having been crossed in love, and, at the same time, twitted with breaking a lamp and laying the blame on other shoulders, in sheer desperation cleared that chasm at a bound—hence its name—and extinguished himself and his light in the loch. It is said, he may be seen haunting the border of the loch, with his ladder on his shoulder, to this day; and sometimes, at midnight, a parcel of imps are heard pursuing

him, with cries of 'Leerie, Leerie, licht the lamps!'"

"Oh, John, John——," said Fanny.

"I suppose, John," said Lizzie, "that's the bones of a reading you are going to give in the parish of New Broom, to the Young Men's Literary Institute; a legend of the Leerie mountains, well worked up, it might tell; couldn't you make the lovers haunt that romantic seat?" and she pointed to a board resting on two big stones, between the only trees in the immediate neighbourhood, two very tall slim poplars, whose leaves were for ever on the wag, and which bent their lofty heads to every passing breath of wind—type of supple courtiers they—standing at the side of all that appeared in the shape of a garden—we made it out to be such from some bushy boxwood with great gaps in it, which seemed intended as borders for walks. The fields beyond it, however, were in fine order, and there was a large grass park to the right, with not fewer than a score of beautiful cows in it, looking so secure and comfortable, they seemed the very impersonation of calm, contemplative enjoyment. But the view was very fine. The range of hills we saw was planted in a semi-circle. A wide moor and the sheet of water already mentioned, which we found went by no more romantic name than the "pound," lay between us and them. The highest of them just opposite our windows heaved its great broad shoulder sheer against the blue sky, the others in a picturesquely serrated mass, stretched right and left. The even-

ing sun brought out the dells, rents, and chasms, in their sides, and quivered on the surface of the tarn, while a passing cloud laid part of them in shadow.

"That," said John, "is what I think Dr England calls a 'feeding' view. Do you know what a 'feeding' view is, Miss Noble?"

"A view that satisfies one, I suppose, as a hungry man is satisfied with a meal."

"Just so. When the doctor has a holiday, he does not spend it, running from place to place. He squats in the neighbourhood of a 'feeding' view, and feeds himself; makes himself thoroughly master of the situation. It's a plan I like; talk of nature being same,—why, no beauty in her teens changes her dress so often as good old dame Nature. Look from that window every hour of every day, and you will see a change each time."

"If you have eyes to see it, Mr John," said Lizzie, "but there will be a view from the front windows, too," and we moved to them. We saw an immense extent of country under cultivation, belted in the distance by the sea. We saw villages, and farm houses. Parts were richly wooded, and gentlemen's seats were visible among the foliage. We could see, on the track of more than one railway, the vapour and smoke darting out and in among the trees, as the train shot past. The trains were too distant for us to hear their noise; the distance took also from their size and awe-inspiring character, so that they looked like docile little animals, trotting

over the plain; only when it grew dark, and you saw the one fiery eye, glare along the country side, did you think of some fabled monster.

When we had rested, Mr Morgan, Fanny, and I, went out to have a saunter. As Fanny was always either behind or before us, I seized the opportunity of saying, "Mr Morgan, I have been thinking it might be a plan worth trying, while we are here, that we should all be total abstainers—never have wine or spirits on the table."

"What difference does our being here make?"

"There are fewer tastes to consult, and perhaps we are the more pliable portion."

"Well," he said, "I don't know if it would do any good."

"It can't do much harm," I said.

"No, it can't," he replied; "and if you think it would do any good, we might try. For my own part, my constitution won't allow me to be a total abstainer. I require to take a glass of wine occasionally, but I can do it privately."

"Mr Morgan," I said, "are you ever afraid of becoming a drunkard?"

"Never. You know what the Greeks did,—made their helots drunk to disgust their children. No, I shall never be a drunkard."

"Does Dr England order you wine?"

"Not he. I am my own doctor. I know my constitution better than he does."

"I have been reading a good deal about drunkenness of late; and I confess it makes me feel eerie to hear a young man say, he cannot do without wine."

"My dear Miss Noble," he said, "keep yourself thoroughly at ease on my account. I'm not the only person in Britain who takes a little wine every day, and never gets beyond it. People that like drink for its own sake don't drink wine."

"Still," I urged, "it is a dangerous prescription. I would try another. Why should not pure air and plenty of exercise be stimulus enough for you; drink milk, when you are thirsty, or water;" and we both laughed.

"Milk and water are well enough for people whom they suit. By all means let them take them. I don't insist that they take wine or spirits. They don't suit me, and the other does, consequently it is my duty—mind, Miss Noble, my duty—to take it; and I would be neglecting a means of health, of keeping my mind and body in working trim, and despising a gift of Providence, if I didn't."

"But, of all things, this is so seductive, so liable to abuse."

"Well, so it is, I am deeply grieved to say. It would certainly begin a new and glorious era if men would learn to drink in moderation."

"They'll never learn to do that while they drink at all. Of that I am sincerely convinced."

"So am not I. Let a man be a Christian, and he will keep that appetite in check as well as every other."

"Yes," I said, "*let* him be a Christian; let strong drink permit him to be a Christian; let the lion lie down with the lamb."

"When you came to us, you held sensible views on that subject, Miss Noble."

"Yes, they were rather too sensible. If I were to awake in the night, and see the opposite house burning, it would be sensible in me to turn round and lie still. I might go to warn or help the poor people, it is true; but then I might get cold; I might injure my constitution, and after all do no good; besides, it is their business, although, to be sure, it is a sad thing. So I wrap myself up and fall asleep. The next time I awake the fire has spread, the house I am in burns, it is time then, surely, to do something, is it not? But, even then, I don't forget to be sensible. I am safe; I walk out unscathed. Some people perish; it is altogether an appalling thing; I deplore it from my heart's core, and warn people to take care of fire, to keep it in the grate, and on no account to drop a live cinder near anything that will burn. Common sense, you see, guides me to the last."

"Of course. I see what you are driving at. I should like, if you don't object, to put you through a course of logic. I think you would enjoy it."

"Thank you," I said, and we went into the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

I MET Mrs Brown, the farmer's wife, when I went in. She was a fresh, rosy-faced, little woman,—clean, as she would have expressed it, as a new “preen.” Her printed gown was made in a fashion which was then thoroughly out of date. She had a blue and white checked apron, going nearly half round her body and down to her feet. A little black and white checked woollen shawl was pinned across her breast, and a very white thick muslin cap completed her dress.

She said, “Ye’re welcome to Leerielaw, Mem. I hope ye’ll can mak’ yeresels comfortable.”

I said, “There was little danger of our not doing that; we had enjoyed tea exceedingly.”

“Weel,” she said, “ou aye hae tea and til’t on the Sabbath days, an’ I canna say but I enjoy it better nor a regular denner.”

“You stand high here,” I remarked.

“Aye, ou’re unco weel seen, an’ ou get the wund aboot us, but it’s a fine healthy place; ye’ll get some red in yere cheeks afore ye gang awa’, I dout na.”

Leerielaw was a dairy farm, and Mr and Mrs Brown kept as few servants as they could, and worked harder than any of them; late and early they were at it. They had two children, a little girl who went three miles to school every day, and undertook to fetch and carry our letters and newspapers, and a youth who

was acting as tutor in a gentleman's family. Him his mother never tired of speaking about. "Chairles" was everything that was good and dutiful, and as he was to be attending college at L—— next winter, his mother promised that he should visit us. Mrs Brown, I found, was a second wife, and a son and daughter of Mr Brown's former marriage were residing in a town ten miles off. He was a fine specimen of the old Scotch farmer. He had been a tall, good-looking man, but was now somewhat bent. He had a fine reverend-looking head, and his face bespoke kindness and sagacity. To the fashion of his youth he stuck, in the matter of knee-breeches and rig-and-fur stockings, which on Sundays were covered with leggings, when he also wore a shirt with broad cambric frills, beautifully plaited by his wife.

Mrs Brown told me that they had had grievous losses within the last few years, one way and another.

"Ou thocht, ou wad hae been fairly bate, but there's folk waur off than us, an' I dinna think the gudeman wad hae minded his ither losses sae muckle, but he lost a gude dale wi his auld son,—that took him sair doon and bent his shouthers."

"What is your son doing now?" I asked.

"Weel he's keeping a public-hoose, sair against his faither's will, but he wad hae it, that it was a trade a' body made siller at, an' it may be sae, but ou wud gie a gude dale to see him oot o't."

"His sister lives with him?"

"Aye, the noo, but she's gaun to be married to a dacent farmer like oursels, if the harvest was weel ower."

Disappointed as we had all been more or less, on our arrival, none of us wearied of Leerielaw. Mr Morgan arrived from L—— one Saturday afternoon, with a small basket carriage which could hold four, or even five people at a pinch, and a pony, warranted to be as steady as a rock under all circumstances, which it certainly was, except when free from harness, and at large in a park—there it would give us both work and fun for an hour or two to catch it. It was nothing new to me to drive, and the girls were very eager to learn. We had many excursions, and discovered bosky dells, and rippling burns, and romantic nooks in plenty. I was surprised at the ignorance Lizzie and Fanny showed about country matters, as much as they probably were, at my want of knowingness in town life.

What I knew of trees, and wild flowers, and birds, I had picked up unconsciously, as a child living in the country does, but it was all new to them, and of course, I enjoyed exhibiting my stock of novelties as old as creation. It really was a halcyon time, "a jewelley parenthesis" lying between the anxious, disagreeable winter I had had, and the still more trying time to come. Practically, we were total abstainers, (except, I fancy, Mr John's private glass of wine) and really Mrs

Morgan throve under the system. She was often in a defiant mood still, at war with herself and ready to fight with any other person; and at other times it appeared to me that she thought four months of entire sobriety entitled her to a high degree in the order of merit. Miss Morgan, too, showed a much more equal temperament; for weeks after we went to our country quarters, her first question to her father, or David, (one of them always came on the Saturday, and staid till Monday,) was, "Had any of the stolen things been traced?" but as time passed on, and they were never heard of, she evidently felt much relieved. With these two members of the family comparatively out of harm's way, I felt very much more at ease.

I think that with the Browns and the few people with whom we came in contact, Mrs Morgan was the most popular member of our party. She would go into the kitchen and take a seat by the fireside while Mrs Brown was busy baking, and superintend the *girdle* that hung from a chain above a well-built peat-fire, and could be let down or drawn up by turning a handle. She would converse on all and sundry affairs with a fine motherly experience, and I am convinced Mrs Brown did not think a better head of a family existed. It came out that Mr and Mrs Brown were total abstainers, (I suspect Mr Morgan knew this too, when he took the house,) and one afternoon, when I was in the kitchen, Mrs Morgan discussed the subject with

Mrs Brown with the utmost candour and equanimity.

"Yes, Mrs Brown," she said, "I think that for those who are so sunken as really to have lost all power of self-restraint, total abstinence is the only thing, the only thing, but farther than that I cannot go."

"Weel," said Mrs Brown, "its no a bad thing for onybody, as I think, but everybody does na see wi' ae pair o' een; there's oor Willie, it's been a sair, sair vexation to his faither an' me, his gaun in to the public-hoose line." (I think Mrs Brown only knew Mr Morgan was a merchant; I don't suppose she had been told the kind of merchandise, in which he dealt.)

"But you should not vex yourself about it, Mrs Brown; houses of refreshment are necessary, and your son may do very well; no doubt, he may be a little in the way of temptation, but what's a person worth that can't stand that?"

I wondered if she thought I was purely an idiot, or if she was so brazen, as to have lost all sense of shame; but after all, poor creature, it was a strong "temptation" to her, where she was not known, to stand once more on the pinnacle from which she had so sadly fallen.

"And," resumed Mrs Brown, "Willie wud hae his sister wi' him, an' if a public-hoose is a bad place for a young man, it's a waur for a young woman; but she was keen to gang, so as it was only to be for a jiffie, ou just let her."

Here the *girdle* came off and the immense porridge pot went on, and Fanny got leave to

stir in the meal, a work which gave her great enjoyment, as also the dishing of the porridge, when it was ready, into bickers and bowls. Mrs Morgan begged that she might have a small bowl filled for her, "porridge was so delightful, when a large quantity was made." Hers she ate with the accompaniment of cream, rich and sweet. For my own part, I admire the Baron of Bradwardine's taste, who preferred a mixture of cream and churned milk, porridge along with which might content a queen.

So time passed, till our original term of three months had extended to five; the days were getting short, the nights airy; a full ruddy harvest moon was hanging between our windows and the hills; day-light had not yet faded. Miss Morgan asked me if I would take a stroll up by the loch. We went, leaving Mrs Morgan, John, and Fanny, seated round a brisk fire that had ousted "honesty" from its place in the grate. As we passed, we looked in upon Mr and Mrs Brown in their little parlour. Mr Brown was sitting in the window. He had been reading aloud something amusing from the newspapers which he had in his hand. He had pushed his spectacles up on his forehead to look at Mrs Brown and enjoy a laugh unshackled.

"Are ye no late eneuch for ye're walk, leddies?" he said.

"We're not likely to meet with anything disagreeable, are we?" said I.

"No, no," he said, "if ye dinna get the cauld. It'll be a hairy o' frost the nicht, I'm thinking."

And he went to the door with us and said, "It's a fine harvest nicht, for which we canna be ower thankfu'."

I confess to having misspent portions of time in church, looking at Mr Brown. If I had been an artist, I might have been tempted to have transferred his head to my thumb nail; with a view to a portrait on a bigger canvas, and my picture would have gathered (if faithful) a crowd round it in any exhibition; but whether to take him in his church phase of fixed attention, or at his fireside enjoying a joke, or with upturned face sending a glance all round the horizon, I would have been at a loss; but I was to see him in yet another phase.

CHAPTER IX.

WE wandered up past the loch. It was fixed that we were to return to L—— the next day, and I daresay we went a bit further than we would have done in consideration of its being the last time,—not that either of us was very romantic or sentimental, but it was singularly pleasant. Every one knows the delicious witchery of the silvery haze cast over the land by the light of the moon. As the well-regulated, subdued lamp is to the middle-aged beauty, so is the light of the moon to our dear mother earth; it brings out her loveliness and hides her blemishes. The road wound on before us,

hard and white part of our way. We had fields on each side covered with stooks, having, as they stood, the effect of a rich pattern in embroidery; then we had the moor stretching on one side and the loch on the other. By and by, the moon got high enough to see herself in the water, which shook and shivered under the gaze as if it were not accustomed to it every night. In the general stillness we heard the cluck, cluck, of the water against the sides of a little boat that was moored to a miniature quay; the water fell back again in silver fragments, and in front of us the big "Law," black and majestic, stood always, his foot in the tarn and his shoulder touching heaven, in stern immobility, giving immense force to the bold oriental figure, "The mountains skip like rams."

Miss Morgan had one good quality which does not belong to every young lady of her age,—she could hold her tongue for a very long time; and, in addition, she never teased other people to speak. I really felt grateful for this, and I think neither of us enjoyed our walks the less, that they were often begun and ended almost in silence. I don't suppose our thoughts were always very valuable, but at any rate they did not come forth to vex the still evening air with their chatter; for my own part, I don't dignify the dreamy reverie in which I indulged, with the name of thinking. We had turned to go home, and were nearing the loch again, when we heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and then we heard voices speaking in a high key.

Presently, just as we got to the very edge of the road to keep out of the way, a dog-cart drove past; it was a spidery, unstable-looking affair, painted black, and picked out with dingy red, as I could see even by the light of the moon which glittered on parts of it; two men were on the front, and a woman on the back seat. I thought the man who was driving did not seem to know what he was doing, for he was using his whip freely, and pulling the horse's head now one way, and now another.

"That man must be drunk," said Miss Morgan, "it will be a wonder, if there's not an accident."

The words were hardly out of her mouth, when the horse began to back across the road, where it was not more than a few feet from the loch, and only an old thorn hedge which had been cut to the ground, within the week, between it and the water; we stood and held our breath, and in an instant the whole thing went sheer over into the deep pool. A wild shriek cleft the air and smote all the echoes; one of the men made a desperate spring, and falling on the very brink, clutched a thorn stump, and clambered up.

We ran forward; I saw the horse struggling to set itself free, and I suppose the harness gave way, for it swam to an open part of the bank—landed, shook itself, and began cropping the herbage amid the horror and excitement of the scene. The man who had escaped, sat on the road side, apparently stupified.

Miss Morgan said, "What can we do?"

"Nothing," I said, "but run for assistance; go you down the road, I'll go up, if any body's near, that shriek must have been heard." I had not gone many yards, when I saw two men running towards me. "Lassie," they said, "what screech was yon?"

"A gig has gone right over into the loch," I gasped, "and two people are struggling in the water."

"Folk droonin'! have a care o' me, lassie," and he dashed past me into a foot-path, the other following him. They did not lose a minute in getting the oars, shoving off the boat, and rowing towards the spot. Lizzie had not left the place,—she was standing close by the man whose presence of mind had saved him from immersion in the loch, and I heard her say in a beseeching voice—"Go for any sake, I'm not alone."

"How much? and I'll go."

"There," she said, and pushing something into his hand, he went off down the road rapidly. I had not time to ask her about this at the moment, for looking at the water, I saw the woman rise to the surface twice, and go down again—if she could only have known to have kept still, but she struggled desperately. Just as she was going down, for the last time I thought, one of the men reached her with his oar, and with it he held her up, till he could grasp her, and lift her into the boat. When he did so, he turned her face up. "My God!" he cried, "it's Phemie." The tone in which these

words were uttered rang in my ears for months. When they got to the bank, he took her in his arms and actually ran with his burden to the nearest house, a shepherd's cottage, about ten minutes' distance on the edge of the moor. I followed to see if I could be of any use. I had some idea of what should be done in a case of the kind, but as the previous winter a man had fallen through the ice, and been brought there to be resuscitated, the shepherd's wife knew the process to be gone through, and set about it instantly, and gave me directions quietly and distinctly how I could best assist her. The man looked in the girl's face—I couldn't describe that look—and said, "I'll ride for the doctor, I'll bring him quicker than any ither body." He sent the shepherd to the pond to help there. When he went out the shepherd's wife whispered to me, "They were to be married after harvest."

I said, "Who is she—Phemie what?"

"Phemie Brown." Our landlord's daughter!

In a short time the men returned, carrying the body of her brother,—it was he who had been driving. It seemed he had gone under the gig, and been kept down in the water; there was less hope of him, but every effort was tried. When the doctor came I left, as I thought they would be wondering at home what had become of us.

I found Miss Morgan outside anxiously waiting for me. "Are they recovering?" she asked.

"There's not a symptom of it, but the doctor

says it is still possible—he says every thing has been done that ought to have been done.”

“This is awful, Miss Noble,” she whispered. “Do you know the one who was driving was drunk. The man that jumped off the gig when it went over says so. He says the horse was going quietly enough, when they came up to him walking on the road, and offered him a ride; poor creature, he was stunned by his fall, but he has been able to go on.”

“Lizzie,” I said, “it strikes me I’ve heard that man’s voice before. It had a wonderful likeness to the one I heard on the night of the robbery say ‘Lizzie! Lizzie!’”

“Well, I didn’t hear that, so I can’t say,” she replied frankly.

“What interest of his was it to know that you were not alone?”

“Oh, you heard me, did you? I thought he might be anxious to get to the end of his journey, and it was a pity for him to stay, thinking I was alone.”

“Indeed,” I replied. I could not avoid a lurking suspicion that there was something concealed; but I asked no further, as I thought it better that I should remain in ignorance all my life than that Miss Morgan should practise and acquire ease in equivocating, and I returned to the accident, and said, “Do you know, Miss Morgan, they are the son and daughter of Mr Brown?”

“The good old man, how will he stand it? But surely they will recover.”

"I hope so," I said. "The daughter was to be married to the young man who took her out of the water."

"Was to be—I hope she will be."

"I doubt it is almost hoping against hope. I wish I could have staid to have seen how it will end. We must say nothing of it to the Browns yet. I daresay your brother will walk up to-night and learn the issue."

"To be sure he will. They surely won't die, both of them," and we walked on in silence. When we went in John Morgan looked up from his book and said,

"Why, what has happened? You look scared, both of you. Have you seen poor Leerie's ghost?"

"Hush, hush, John," said his sister. "We have seen a terrible thing to-night. We have seen two persons almost drowned; it is not known yet whether they will recover, and it is feared not."

When they had heard the particulars, Mr Morgan said he would go and bring us word of the result. I said I felt so anxious that I would go with him rather than wait. Lizzie said she would like to go too, but she was very tired.

As we walked, I told him that drink was at the bottom of this sad accident. "Drunkenness," I said, "is surely an enormous evil under the sun."

"It is indeed," he assented.

"And is it your opinion," I asked, "that nothing should be done to check it?"

"My opinion that nothing should be done to

check it? How have I managed, Miss Noble, to give you that impression? I think everything should be done to check it that is done to check any other sin."

"People are imprisoned for stealing. Do you mean they ought to be imprisoned for drinking?"

"No, I don't. Now, Miss Noble, you know as well as I do, that there is a class of offences which the law may take cognizance of, and another class of which it may not take cognizance."

"Then what check do you propose?"

"I propose to educate people—to enlighten their consciences."

"Mr Morgan," I said, "do you suppose that the most miserable wretch on the Low Street of L—— does not know that he is doing wrong when he is making himself drunk?"

"Probably he does, but he does not care."

"Then how do you make him care?"

"Now that is exactly the point, Miss Noble. I am glad you have come so directly knock against it. How, indeed? It will require a higher power than either yours or mine to bring that about. No, teetotalism is not the gospel, although its advocates would sometimes make it a substitute."

"That's ungenerous, Mr Morgan. No teetotaler does that. No, it is not *the* gospel, but it is *a* gospel. Surely it is good tidings to many a wretched wife and family, when they hear that the husband and father is a teetotaler, and if you wanted to deliver a very important message, you would not make it known to a drunken man;

you would know it was of no use. Now that's all the merit tectotalers claim for their cause. It makes a way for the gospel, and I doubt, Mr Morgan, if education is the remedy for drunkenness. There is a plentiful crop of drunkards gathered from all the learned professions. I'll tell you of a case, which my sister told me in a letter only yesterday, of a minister in the town where she is at school, who for years was a useful and respected man there, but in the end fell a victim to drunkenness, and had to leave. Well, half a dozen years after he came back—I don't exaggerate one particle—barefooted, and in rags, to beg in the very town where he had been so much looked up to—he, the educated man of refinement; conceive of the process that had been going on during these years."

"It is very appalling," he said, "very appalling indeed."

I said, "Mr Morgan, if you would only throw your influence, your example, and your abilities, into the cause of total abstinence, how immense the good is you might do!"

"Well, Miss Noble, no doubt I should influence a class; but there is another class, much larger, and wider, and more intelligent, with whom I should lose influence altogether probably. I myself am not apt to be influenced by a man who runs to extremes. The well-balanced man, who in all things hits the happy medium, who goes right along the common sense road on whatever subject, is the man who would influence me, who, I think, would carry the most weight in the world."

"Mr Morgan, some celebrated person, I forget, at this moment, his name, has said, that no man ever succeeded in any great enterprise who did not seem to his fellow-men to be in *some sort* crazed—the apostle Paul, for instance."

"Yes, but I don't think, to do them justice, that teetotalers make out that they are inspired; the apostle was, and he recommended wine."

"Mr Morgan," I said, "suppose the house you are going to, turns out to be the house of death, that these young creatures have perished, will you go back to Mr Brown, and tell the old man, that his son has been drowned while drunk, and then ask him to take a glass of wine to cheer and gladden his heart?"

"No, I don't think it would cheer him, there is a time for everything."

"Yes," I said, "and because of the terrific burden of sin and misery under which the land groans, I take this to be the time for total abstinence."

CHAPTER X.

WHEN we reached the cottage, we found our worst fears realized; every means had been used, for hours, but the lives of that brother and sister had gone beyond recall. They lay side by side in "the room." The face of the young farmer was as blanched as that of the girl who lay there

so fixed and still. The doctor was about taking his leave. John Morgan moved a step forward, and said, "Let us pray!" His prayer was a brief, earnest, touching cry to Him who has promised to be a very present help in trouble. He made no effort at what is called improving the occasion; but I think the chief mourner there must have felt that he had the sympathy of God and man. When we came out, John said to me, "I would have asked you to sit there for a little, till I went part of the way with that poor lad, but I felt that any human presence would be a burden to him."

I have seen many men who made more fuss and palaver about things than John Morgan, but I never met with one who gave me more thoroughly the impression of true fellow-feeling than he. His sympathy was keen, and as a consequence, entirely unostentatious. I thought of this as we walked—it drew me to him. Who was I, that I should feel captious because he didn't see a subject in the light that I saw it? Certainly it was not so long since I had begun to see it in its true colours, that I must be impatient because others did not feel all at once as I did regarding it. Still, with such a home as he had, it was strange that he didn't.

As we went in, Mrs Brown—always the last in the household to go to bed, as she was among the first to stir in the morning—came out of her little parlour to lock the house-door for the night. She hoped we had had a pleasant walk. I said, "It is a very pleasant evening."

"Ay," she said, "it's sic' a braw nicht, I ance thoct Phemie and her brother wad hae been here, but they'll be comin' the morn, an' it's just as weel; they'll cheer us up after ye gang away, for ou'll be dull. I never like folk to gang away;" and she kindly and heartily bade us good-night. Poor woman! I felt thankful that even the short space which was to be bridged over by sleep,—and so all the shorter,—lay between her and the terrible news, for it had been agreed to defer telling them till morning, when the minister, of whose church Mr Brown was an elder, was expected to "break" the matter to him.

Lizzie and Fanny were hushed and overawed when they heard what the end had been. Mrs Morgan instantly "supposed the bodies would not be brought home to-night,"—said it was a good thing we were going home to-morrow, as the Browns might wish to have their house to themselves.

When I left the sitting-room after Mrs Morgan and the girls, Mr Morgan, as he bade me good night, said, "Miss Noble, we shall not quarrel about teetotalism, shall we?"

"I hope not," I said.

"You know," he added, "we are at one about the enormity of the evil."

"Oh," I said, "you will consider it again I am sure; a radical evil needs a radical cure—if a limb has mortified, doctors don't shilly-shally about using the knife."

"Miss Noble, when I am making a sermon, if

I am at a loss for an illustration, I'll apply to you."

"For any sake, don't make the shadow of a joke at present, think of that old man sleeping below—will he ever sleep quietly again till his grey hairs go in sorrow to the grave? Think of the sight we left in yon room; teetotalism may be a good thing pushed to an extreme, it may have unwise advocates, but depend upon it, it is the only effectual remedy for the curse that seems to me to overshadow every family in the land—why, some men will spend a fortune advertising a quack pill, and make a treble fortune selling it; if only half as much faith could be inspired as to total abstinence,—disease, and misery, and crime would be shorn of their strength, they would be Samson with his hair cut.

"*You are fertile in illustration.*"

"Well, well, I make you a present of my illustrations, stick them into any sermon you like, but positively I can't even smile to-night—good night."

Nor could I sleep for a long time, and the first cheerful sounds of the business of the farm awoke me. I heard the boy whistling as he took the cows out to the grass, after being milked, and the decent old collie that helped him barking, and the stamping and stuttering of the cows' feet, low answering low. I heard the women coming in, singing snatches of songs, carrying the frothing pails, and Mrs Brown's foot and voice were on the alert. Where was Mr Brown? I put my head out at my bedroom

door, and met the strong wholesome smell of porridge and peat smoke that filled the stair. I went into my room again, and lifting the blind aside, I saw the minister coming slowly toward the house. Other eyes than mine would see him; they would wonder how he should come there at that hour, but probably they would think of every reason but the right one. He has entered. There is a general hush. My heart bleeds for that good old man. When Abraham was about to offer up his son, he did it at God's command:—at whose bidding had his children been sacrificed? It was a terrible moment. After a time, I see the minister leaving the house. I think I will go out, so I slip down stairs, and in passing the little parlour door, I hear Mr Brown's voice reading the sixty-first psalm. It seems as if he would choke, but he goes on. I go round to the back of the house, and muse a little, and gaze at the hill, the great black hill. I go in again. They in that parlour are at prayer, the same voice coming over the same words again, "Though thou slay me, yet will I trust in thee."

Upstairs, Mrs Morgan was in the middle of parcels, and trunks, and boxes, and she was holding forth about some arrangement she had made, showing its infinite superiority over some other very stupid arrangement that some other body had made; not that she forgot to enquire for the Browns, for she had often told me that she was a woman of very extreme sensitiveness and delicacy.

So we left Leerielaw, but before we went, Mr Morgan and I knocked faintly at the parlour door. Mrs Brown opened it. Her cheery look was gone; her eyes had been hurriedly wiped with her apron. Mr Brown rose from his chair and held out his hand, his voice shook as he said, "Fareweel;" that was the only word he uttered. We withdrew, and they were alone to receive their dead. It was a terrible episode.

So we left our elevated quarters, and were soon in the vale below; but amid the scream of engines, the shunting of carriages, the pointing out of luggage, and the shifting concourse of people, at all the stations, my thoughts constantly strayed back to the solitary house we had left, and its woe-struck inhabitants. The contrast was striking, to look on this picture and on that. Not that a railway station is without its tragedies; for grief and care take out their tickets first, second, or third class, as the case may be, very often I dare say, but they are not just visible to the passing glance, and the cheery, amusing features of the scene, are most conspicuous.

Very possibly, reader, you were in the same carriage with us that day. If so, I wonder where in the social scale you placed us. I am quite sure you never thought we had any connection with a whisky-shop, in the Low street of L——. In fact, I think we were rather a distinguished looking group. John Morgan looked well; he had not yet assumed clerical costume; he wore a fashionably made grey travelling suit, and a low

crowned Leghorn straw hat, with a narrow black ribbon round it. His gloves were faultless; I had never once seen him at Leerielaw go out without gloves, buttoned at the wrist, and never taken off till he came in. His hands were his foible; I think he didn't mind a bit getting his face browned, but his hands never saw sun or air; well, it might be silly, but at least it was harmless. Miss Morgan in her travelling cloak, which swept round her in elegant folds, her hat and feathers, her dainty gold chain and locket, encircling her handsomely turned neck, with her lithe graceful bearing, might have floated in public opinion a worse looking party than we were. Mrs Morgan had been good-looking, and was well dressed; moreover, she always spoke to officials, as if she had been accustomed all her life to have a footman behind her chair. Fanny and I made the background. If Mr Morgan or Mr David had been with us, any body might have classed us. You couldn't have been at Mr Morgan's back, when he was taking out his ticket, without knowing that he had money, that he had made it himself, and that to live in his atmosphere, would hardly constitute a liberal education, either in the letter or the spirit. If you had entered into conversation with him, you might have heard him say of some member of government that he had lost his "prestige," or pronounce "depôt" on the same principle as teapot—language altogether innocent, certainly, but which one enjoys more in a railway acquaintance, than in a nearer connection: as

for Mr David, nice, respectable lad as he was, he was more of the gent than the gentleman.

In one waiting-room where we were, a lady was half-lying, half-sitting on a sofa, and the woman who looked after the rooms was holding a basin close under her chin, in spite of which her fine dress and shawl were abominably besmeared, her bonnet was off, her hair straggling about her face. One person as unskilled as I once was, said, "Poor creature, how very sick she is."

"Sick," said another, "she is drunk, completely drunk; how very disgusting, she ought not to be allowed to come in here."

Just then a railway porter entered, and walked up to her.

"Come, ma'am," he said, and he lifted her bonnet, and put it on roughly enough, "the train's starting, and your husband's waiting, come along."

"Gently," said the woman who had the basin in her hand.

"Gently," said he, "she's beastly, it's no the first time I've carried her to the train, come along," and he locked his arm in hers, and began to help her up.

"Who is she? where does she come from?" asked the woman.

"Who she is, is none of my business," said the man, "nor where she comes frae, but I'll tell ye where she's gaun to if you like," with which significant, if not very polite remark he bore her off, for she neither could stand nor walk alone.

I expected Mrs Morgan would make some neat moral reflections on this "incident of travel," but she didn't. I really think she felt it held a mirror up to herself.

We soon shook into our old ways at Honeycomb House, Fanny went back to school, Miss Morgan resumed her frequent journeys out and in to town in the omnibus, and I found it necessary to be the dear and close companion of "sensible, firm temperament" to mamma—in addition, I would have been the better of the patience of Job, and eyes in the back of my head. It must have been a fearful craving which she had at times, and to see the article on the table, day by day, and get what was a mere drop to her, must have been like the punishment of Tantalus. To gratify this passion seemed almost the end of her life, and, of course, my endeavours were not always successful in preventing the means being got; if the keys were left in the sideboard three minutes, a bottle would disappear; she employed beggars to bring it, and on more than one occasion, she went into public-houses, and was sent home drunk. It was curious how, after each relapse, Mr Morgan would flatter himself, that now there would be a change; certainly, if kindness and long-suffering would have wrought a change, there would have been one. That faith forsook me, short as had been my experience compared with his, and so very disagreeable did I find my post that, interested as I was in the family, and attached to them as I had grown, I again and again

came to the resolution to resign it, and still shrank from doing so.

I am tempted, in the course of my narrative, to lay down my pen and muse. I think if I had left Honeycomb House then, how much I would have been spared; how much one dear to me as life would have escaped, if I had seen the whole way marked out before me, as I see it now lying behind me; but a decision, made almost by chance, so-called—a very trivial error of judgment—and with light hearts we set off in the direct road to misery. There is the door by which we entered; and having entered, we can't turn and go back—we must flounder on through brake and brier, Will-o'-the-wisp now in sight and now out of it; and truly we might feel inclined, out of sheer pity, to take ourselves in our arms, and weep over ourselves, groping about so thickly blind-folded. But patience—this discipline of suffering is not undergone for nothing.

Miss Morgan had never concealed her opinion, that if she was as free to go as I was, she would not be a week in the house; and I think that, though Mr Morgan thought I was amply paid—which, as women's wages go, I was—he sometimes had a fear that I would throw up my situation, and did everything he could to reconcile me to it. We had not been home for two or three weeks, when he proposed that I should invite my sister to pay me a visit; and he said he did not see anything to hinder my going to West Valley Cottage and bringing her. Mary had finally left school, and was staying with the

Acroyds, trying to fill, as she said, my shoes. I had never been at the cottage since I left, nor had I seen my sister for a year and a half, so that I was right glad to go; and John Morgan said, "If I didn't mind taking him, he should like very much to go too;" consequently I wrote to my sister that we were coming in the beginning of the following week, and that I hoped to bring her back with us. I did not expect she would object. I had never said to a friend I had what unruly skeleton was shut in with us in Honeycomb House. Mrs Morgan had just got over one of her fits, and I could calculate that for some time the evil spirits would be in abeyance; so that I thought the visit would be a very pleasant one to Mary.

CHAPTER XI.

I FELT quite high in spirits at this prospect of seeing my sister so soon, and turned out, on the Saturday evening to a concert, to which David had asked Lizzie and myself to go, feeling that I would enjoy it, should it only be a solo on the hurdy-gurdy. David kept himself well abreast of all that went on in town, and he patronised all rational amusements—I don't think he went to the theatre; at least, he never asked us to go there. I think he and his father thought it a very dangerous place

to frequent. They didn't write plays you see, nor look at the theatre through the massive gold eye-glasses that always assisted their naked vision when they surveyed the handsome premises, with the conspicuous signboards, "Morgan & Son, Wholesale and Retail, &c." I have heard that if a man reads a newspaper carefully, he must needs be a man of intelligence and information; now David read the newspapers diligently—I never saw him read anything else, and he was really a steam-power of newspaper knowledge; he had all the outsides, you know what I mean, of everything that took place, thoroughly at his finger-ends, but whether he ever chewed the cud of any subject is a different story. Not but that he had his own opinions; he had his opinion about the theatre you observe, and a number of others made up, and labelled, and always ready for use.

Miss Morgan had some odds and ends to do in town, so we went in, in the afternoon, having arranged to pick up our escort, at one of his places of business, that in Low Street, where I had been before on the occasion when Miss Morgan had used me as a mechanical power to screw five pounds out of her brother. By the by, I had never yet been able to form even a guess, where that money, and I suspect much more than that, had gone to.

We went to the omnibus—I should have preferred walking, but Miss Morgan invariably took the omnibus. She had mentioned to me the day before, that she had lost one of her best

pocket-handkerchiefs, in the corner of which she had taken the trouble of embroidering her name in full, and she felt annoyed at it. I suggested that she might have dropped it in the omnibus, and she might ask about it. She left the omnibus first, and in going out her foot slipped; she would have fallen if the conductor had not with remarkable dexterity caught her, and set her safe on her feet—her face reddened at the little awkwardness; as she shook out her dress, I turned to pay my fare, and as I put a shilling into the man's hand, I saw it visibly tremble, and I said to myself, "Well I would not have thought you a nervous subject," he certainly had no look of it. As I waited for the change, the handkerchief occurred to me, and I said to him, "This lady lost a pocket-handkerchief yesterday, probably in the omnibus—did you see it?" He must have thought I was questioning his honesty, for he coloured deeply and murmured something about so many pocket-handkerchiefs being lost. I said, "This one had a name, 'Lizzie Morgan,' in full in the corner, if you find it, you can return it." Says Lizzie in most dulcet tones, "It's of no consequence, not the slightest." " "

"Look alive!" cried a rough voice; "are we going to stand here all day?" Whereupon the conductor sprang on the step, and I said—

"My change."

"Change!" he said; "what is it?"

"I gave you a shilling."

"Oh!" and he handed me my money.

As we walked away, I said to Miss Morgan, "That man looked confused when I spoke of your handkerchief. Do you think he can have stolen it?"

"Oh! I think so—I am sure of it;" and she laughed a low, silvery laugh.

I said, "I don't think dishonesty is a thing to laugh at; at least, his employers would not laugh at it."

"It's a shocking thing, dishonesty," she said. "Now, don't you think, Miss Noble, that our David would have made a capital omnibus conductor—he never visits dreamland, and he is thoroughly honest. I like to see a man in his right place."

"David is obliged to you," I said, "but I do think that man might be sharper at his business; if he was dreaming, the step of an omnibus is hardly the place to dream."

"Hardly," she replied.

I had been several times in the Low Street of L—. The town of L— boasted a college, and it entered off the Low Street. John Morgan had taken me through it. When you passed its gates, you stepped out of noise, and squalor, and dirt, and ignorance, into quietness, and leisure, and beauty, and learning. It was a quaint mass of old buildings, surrounded by gardens as quaint—rich with blooming flowers, and turf close-shaven and velvety. In here you might imagine the odour of swinging censers, the monkish processions, the worship of saints, and the abject penance of the guilty soul

striving for merit; or you might come to the time when superstition rose off the land like the darkness of night, and with the stormy day-break came the light of the Reformation; or you might think of the celebrated men who had lived and taught here, or of the sons who had gone forth from this seat of learning, of whom their *Alma Mater* loved to boast; or if you liked, you might speculate on which, or how many, of all the eager youths striding out and in would leave their mark on the time; and if you felt any way elevated or proud, then go out there and see how long the feeling would last. I am afraid that I moved along that Low Street gathering my skirts and thanking God that I was not as its inhabitants.

At any time that street was a sight to make a man's faith reel. I had always to fall back on this question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" But this was Saturday, and getting towards evening; the pavements were damp and greasy, and a thick, raw frost was settling down, so that you could handle it; the shops were all tricked out in tempting array—that is, every thing was parcelled off, and ticketed with big figures, indicating "fabulously" low prices; in the butchers' shops, every scrap—skin, bone, and fat—was being thumbed, and fingered, and haggled over, by men and women with keen, pinched faces; grocers were selling tea and sugar in penny-worths, with large profits; and all along the wet, muddy kerb-stones, people were ranged

with little trays filled with varied merchandise—fish, earthenware, vegetables, tins, and toys. Yes! I saw baskets full of dolls dressed gaily in shreds of coloured muslin, gazed at wistfully by dirty, little, sharp-faced children, and lifted up and priced occasionally by mothers, who, I daresay, would fain have spared a penny for the purpose, if it had been possible. I saw one aged, meagre-looking man, with an old battered tray, on which he had about a dozen onions; he took them up, one by one, in his long dirty fingers, and rubbed and polished them, and set them down, now singly, now in groups, and bent his head to have a look at them sideways, to see if the effect was all he could wish. No virtuoso in his museum ever looked half so interested. Then he addressed himself to the public, in feeble, earnest outcry, that mingled with the frosty air as we passed.

But in the midst of the cold, raw atmosphere, and the din, and the squalor, there were some bright spots, and these were the spirit-shops. The doors, which were filled in with ground glass, opened at a touch, and flew back again by magic. The painted and varnished casks with the burnished brass cocks; the French-polished counters, covered with clear, glancing, crystal glasses; the handsome gas lustres—lustrous indeed, for in the fog, every jet inside its richly-patterned globe shone like a moon, attracted attention. I remarked the clock, fixed so conspicuously, — I could not understand how they should here be so particular about time.

Was it a fine piece of satire on the frequenters of these shops? "Number your days, that you may apply your hearts to"—what? I saw a woman come out of one of these places. She had a child in her arms, and a girl of about six years old behind her. She called to the girl to come on. It didn't obey, and again she called. When the little thing ran up to her, she seized the child by the entire hair of its head and twisting her hand in it, shook the creature till it danced with pain; but no cry did it utter. It doubled its small fists and dug them into its mother's side, while its face scowled like an imp of darkness. The woman, with a coarse laugh, let the hair go, and gave the child's face a slap, which, at the distance of several yards, we heard resound amidst all the noise of the street.

A little farther on, at a less crowded part of the pavement, at the entry to a close, two women were standing, and as we came in sight, they suddenly began to quarrel. I have called them women, but they appeared to me like obscene birds of prey. They flew at each other; they fixed their talons in each other's face; their hands were like claws; they screamed in hoarse, thick tones; they hurled terrible names at each other; and, finally, one sank to the cold, wet ground, and her voice went completely away in hoarse screams of "Po-lis, po-lis." A dapper-looking little fellow, dressed in the extreme of fashion, had stood on tiptoe at the edge of the pavement, holding a glass to his eye, looking on with a curious, gratified smile on his countenance; truly

his taste in amusement was, I hope, unique. I thought if any thing in creation was sunk to a lower depth than these two women, it was that little, dandified man.

When a spasm of excruciating pain seizes us, we suddenly realize what a frightful capacity for suffering is latent in the human body. Here, in the Low Street, was thrust home upon me, as it never was before, the terrible pitch of wickedness to which a human soul may attain. Nor did it require any close observation or lingering about to see all that I had seen. It was entirely on the surface. I saw it all, though Miss Morgan, whose thoughts I fancy were not working at problems for the "elevation of the masses," picked her way through the crowds with business-like celerity.

My predecessor had objected to coming to Mr Morgan's place of business in Low Street on account of its vulgarity. Now I can stand a good deal of vulgarity; but I must say, I slunk in at its door with a feeling of shame. On one side was the counter, behind which two men who had laid aside their coats, in compliment to the cosiness of the place probably, were dealing forth their merchandise to just such people as thronged the street. One of them, in deference to my appearance, I imagine, stepped forward to supply me with the "gill" which I might wish to drink or carry away; but I followed Lizzie up stairs. Opposite the counter was a row of boxes where "parties" could have their glass in privacy, although they could not pre-

vent their jest or song being shared by any one within ear-shot. At the end of the shop was a desk with a brass railing and curtain in front of it, from behind which Mr David emerged and came up stairs after me.

"Davie," said his sister, "bring half a glass of brandy for Miss Noble—will you? She despairs of the human race, and I would like to see her heart cheered."

"Thank you," I said; "I don't need brandy for that purpose."

"But you do look white, Miss Noble," said David; "you would be the better of something; but I suppose you would not take brandy."

He rang the bell, and in a little, tea, and various nice accompaniments, came up, really appetising and refreshing.

"My certie, Davie," said Miss Morgan, "this is what total abstinence reports call an excellent and substantial tea."

"Then begin, and do it justice," said our host.

"You should have seen Miss Noble's face coming up the street, David, for she was past speech; and certainly shocking things are to be seen sometimes, but I have got into the way of walking right on and not looking about."

"It's not a nice locality," said David; "but when a man's business is in it he does not mind that. By the way, I doubt I'll not be able to stay all the time at the concert; but I'll take you there, and go back for you—that will do, I suppose."

"Oh," said his sister, "I can survive the disappointment, if Miss Noble can."

We set forth, and after putting us into very comfortable places, Mr David left us, to return before the close of the entertainment to take us home. However, he did not come in time, and Miss Morgan said we would go back to the shop, which was quite near, and get him. The hour was now pretty late, but Mr David's business was going on more briskly than ever. He was behind the counter himself, in the act of handing a dram across to an ill-fed, ill-clad-looking tradesman, whose clothes hung upon him as if they had been made for a bigger man, whose complexion was dingy grey, with bleary, wandering-looking eyes, and a drop at the end of his thin, red nose. From the noise, the boxes seemed to be all full; but, of course, we escaped up stairs instantly.

There, the table was drawn up to a nice, clear fire, and on it was lying an open bible, and a commentary. Miss Morgan glanced at them and said—

"Davie has been studying the lesson for his class to-morrow."

David came up, and apologised for being so late, but said, he had been much engaged, and he had not noticed how time went. As the shop got very full, he went down to assist, and said he had ordered a cab to take us home in a little. So we sat waiting, and the noise below waxed fast and furious. There were dancing and singing, which were soon changed into shouting

and fighting; then there were cries of "They've locked the door," "Break up the door," "Turn them out," "Send for the police;" then there were louder shouting and swearing and a mingling of groans from a man who had been (we heard after) knocked down and kicked and mauled; then the door was forced open, and the police got in, and I heard David's voice trying to control the hurricane, more popularly, "the shindy."

Several of the brawlers were taken into custody, and in the newspapers I saw it stated afterwards, that they had each been sentenced to a fine of five pounds, or sixty days' imprisonment.

Unwounded from the dreadful close, and not even breathless, Fitz Morgan came up stairs, and said he was sorry to have kept us waiting so long, but there had been a row among some drunken blackguards, and he had had to turn them out of the shop. So he shut his Bible, and his commentary, and put them in his pocket, and we departed.

I regarded Mr David as a kind of miracle. How a man could sit and study the Bible, with a view to teach others the more excellent way, in the interval of serving out strong drink to the class of customers I had seen, was a puzzle beyond me. An eloquent writer has likened the flight of time to a man sitting in a boat counting over a string of priceless pearls; he sails on, the end of the string is over the boat's side, and one by one, as he tells off his pearls, silently and surely they drop into the depths behind him,

till all are gone. Imagine the pearls are bodies and souls, and pearls of unimagined value they are, although crowded into such a setting as the miserable Low Street of L——. Do not Messrs Morgan, and such like, put forth a hand to push them down into the deepest depths? Of course they repudiate with horror such an imputation—"We don't compel men to drink," say they. No, it would be better if you did—man's back rises naturally against compulsion—neither do I, when I set a saucer of treacle down in a sunny window, where flies are thick, compel them to go into it, it's no interest of mine that they should go into it; the treacle is there, and if they will alight on it and stick, it is their own blame, not mine.

CHAPTER XII.

THE morning was thick, and raw, and foggy, when we, Mr John Morgan and I, left L—— for West Valley; but when we got some miles out of town, why, we found it was a bright, sunny, October day, cool and serene. The clear, pure air was quite intoxicating, there—I must be haunted by my subject surely, when I used that adjective—and I went back to the time a year ago, when I had bowled along this iron way, shaping out an imaginary future in primeval ignorance; then I knew, and thought as little about the liquor traffic, as about the pistachio

nut traffic of Bagdad; then the world did not divide itself into two great classes, the drunken and the sober; then I had never lived under the shadow of this gigantic upas tree; but I was going back for a little to the happy valley I had so rashly left, and I threw behind me the bitter fruit of the knowledge I had acquired.

Going to the country naturally brought the Browns of Leerielaw to my mind, not but that I had often thought of them, and I remarked to Mr Morgan, that one of us should have written to them, and that I would like much to know how they were.

"Well," he said "I wrote, and there is Mr Brown's answer," handing me a very short note, merely a few lines, thanking him for his kind letter, and saying that they were all well, that his son Charles had gone to L—— to attend college for the winter, and as he was a stranger in L——, bespeaking Mr Morgan's friendship for him.

"Now," said Mr Morgan, "we must have him out with us as often as we can.

"Certainly," I said.

The village of West Valley, was nearly five miles from a railway station, but Mr Acroyd had a little low-hung phaeton, and a decent old pony, which were seldom in use, except in going to and from the station. On this occasion, they, Mr Acroyd and my sister Mary, were all in waiting for us. Mary was a sister to be proud of, and I felt it, when I introduced her to John Morgan. She was taller and larger

in person than Lizzie Morgan, her complexion was dark; thick, glossy braids of black hair framed her face, the features of which were good, but the beauty of it lay in the singularly sweet serene expression; perhaps, there was a tinge of sadness in it, if so, it was the sadness of a child that has been crying over a dead canary, for she was habitually cheerful; clever she was not, in the same sense as Lizzie Morgan, and she was easily led, except in a case of right and wrong—there her instinct was unerring, and no sophistry could bewilder it; she was without guile, she never spake evil of any one, and I think rarely believed it. She certainly was one of those who walk through this life keeping their garments white, and you had always a soothing sense of repose in her presence.

I was warmly welcomed by Mr and Miss Acroyd. Late in the season, as it was, the country had not lost its charms, and the garden at the cottage seemed to have drawn the lingering summer into it, and to be detaining it there on a variety of pretexts. In this West Valley, "summer first unfaulds her robes, and there they longest tarry." Every thing and person were exactly as I had left them—so exactly, that they might have been breathed upon by the genii a half-hour after I departed, and been released again the half-hour after I returned—except one thing in the ways of the house, which struck me as the more remarkable from the general want of change. No wine appeared on the table at dinner, and the customary glass of

toddy was not forthcoming at night. No remark was made by way of explanation, and I wondered if Mr Morgan would feel dreadfully put out by this enforced abstinence. Mary and I were no sooner in our own room, than I said, "Has your stock of wine and spirits run out?"

She laughed. "I daresay," she said, "you will be surprised when I tell you that Mr and Miss Acroyd have turned teetotalers."

"You don't say so. Really I am only less surprised than if they had turned Buddhists. It is certainly an energetic step for them to take. What are their reasons, do you know?"

"Well, I hardly know. I haven't paid much attention to them. I think it 'havers,' their giving up their glass before going to bed."

"They haven't been the worse for wanting it, have they?"

"Oh, I daresay not, it wasn't an absolute necessary; but I like to see people have their comforts."

"So do I."

"But a still more surprising inroad on Mr Acroyd's habits is, that he goes to teetotal meetings in the village. Once, he even agreed to be chairman, if they could not get any other. They got another,—I am sure he was devoutly thankful. Imagine Mr Acroyd chairman at a teetotal meeting!"

"I could hardly imagine a more curious position for him. He must have the cause much at heart."

We spent the forenoon of next day in walking about to see, I was going to say, the lions; but even if that term were applicable, I would not use it to describe the old magnificent elm outside the cottage gate; the pretty school-house on the green knoll, to get at which you crossed a little rustic bridge over a clear burn out of which some little village maiden was always drawing water; or the church, surrounded by its quiet grave-yard, grassy, except where an oblong stone with a name, and date, told its brief story; hard tablet for so touching a history, yet not so hard, but that time shall utterly obliterate name, and memory, from the face of the earth. Supposing we had not been five miles from a railway station, these were hardly the sights to draw an excursion train; nor was the village itself, though picturesquely lying among swelling uplands, its houses standing here and there, with roofs of slate, tile, or thatch, as circumstances had dictated, likely to do so. Most of the houses were inhabited by people employed by the farmers around. Of course there was a tailor, and a shoemaker, and a baker—I knew all these—and a grocer, an elderly lady with a weak mind and a fluent tongue, who was known to have made money; and no wonder, for she stuck like a leech to that respectable and easily understood maxim of commerce, “Buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market;” this we know now to be the basis of a most nefarious system,—but although there are sermons in stones, I doubt if all the

stones of Venice laid together would have convinced our village groceress of it.

I think, as I had often passed through the village, I must have known that it had a public-house. I discovered now that it had two, and both looked flourishing. Let a man break his leg, and he will find that every acquaintance he has, has at one time or another, either had a broken leg himself, or has known some one with a broken leg; that, indeed, taking the world over, broken legs are rather the rule than the exception; so, now that my attention was directed to the subject of drunkenness, I was constantly discovering facts about it, which I never would have noticed before, and they stuck to me as the burs by the hedge-side stuck to my gown.

I took an opportunity, at dinner, that day, to remark on Mr Acroyd's change of habits, and ask his reasons for it.

"Well, Rachel," he said, "my reasons are not far to seek, and they are plentiful enough. Every paragraph in the newspapers where crime, and sin, and accidents are traced to drunkenness, is one of them. There, in that little village of ours—it has four hundred inhabitants—how much is spent, do you think, on drink?"

I said, "I never used to think of it, or if I thought of it at all, I fancied it a happy, sober, little place."

"You know the circumstances of the people, mostly working-men. Well, twelve hundred a year is spent in that village on drink. I have it on certain authority. If I were going to make

a speech—which I may do one of these days, as wonders never cease—I might calculate how much of the road it would pave if it were all in sixpences; or how many kites it would fly if it were all bank notes; or how long it would take to count it if it were all farthings; or I might say that each man, woman, and child might have a surfeit of strawberries when they are at a guinea a pint, and for once feel themselves kings, queens, and princesses; but I merely state the fact; so the more I thought of how much men were the worse for drinking, and of how little the worse they were for abstaining, I came to the conclusion, however it may have been in time past, or however it may be in the future, that in our day, every man's duty is to give up intoxicating drinks. But I don't quarrel with people who don't see as I do. Mary, for instance, thinks it a great pity we shouldn't have our glass, and Mr Virtue, I daresay, thinks I am getting a little silly in my old age. I should not wonder but you and Mr Morgan may think the same."

"Not I, indeed," I said; "I have become a total abstainer too, and for the same reasons as you."

"That's right, Rachel," said Miss Acroyd; "but did ye no think coffee at night just a wee thoct wishy-washy?" and she laughed.

"Then," said Mary, "you'll all be going to the teetotal meeting to-night. Mr Acroyd's going I know, and where he goes, I go."

"Then I shall go too," said Mr Morgan. "What's to be the entertainment?"

"A lecture by somebody, sent by some society. Mr Henry, the baker, in the chair," said Mary. "We don't have many public meetings here, and I assure you, people turn well out; of course, that does not say that they are teetotalers any more than I am."

The meeting was held in the school-room I have mentioned, and it was crowded to the door. It was lighted by tallow candles (as yet the fragrant paraffin was in the bowels of the earth), and a window being open here and there, they flared, and smoked, so that a person with an educated nose must have been driven from the room.

Beside me was seated a man in working clothes, very stupid, and sleepy; his breath came whiff across me every other minute—surely, surely, this must be the odour of stale drink, so abhorrent to Mrs Morgan. I had to keep my face steadfastly towards the door, and away from the lecturer. No doubt, if this man had been drinking, I ought to have been more than glad that he was there, but I wasn't—if he had only been a few removes off!

The seats were forms, without backs, or cushions, crammed with clusters that dropped off at each end. There were several women with *mitches*, and a good sprinkling of infants; altogether a person of refined taste would have felt that teetotalism had not yet attained to her silver slippers. John made some remark to me, to this effect, and I said, "Patience, life always stirs in the roots first, and works upwards."

Then, amidst a general "ruffing," the speaker, Mr Henry, and a few others who accompanied him to the platform, made their way up the length of the room, and the meeting was opened by a brief prayer. The lecturer was a little, slender, middle-aged, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed man, who spoke with great energy, and with all the earnestness which the most thorough conviction of the greatness and goodness of his cause could give him.

CHAPTER XIII.

HE began, "I am here, my good friends, to say a few words to you on the subject of total abstinence from strong drink, and to induce you if I can, to take the pledge. Now, I know you are reasonable beings in this village, although I see you have two public-houses, and I do not think that is very rational, and I would like to speak to you, as men who can understand an argument, in support of any cause you are asked to support.

"I have no doubt you have heard objections brought against this cause, and one of these which has been often urged by ministers and elders, who take their glass of wine after dinner, or their glass of toddy at bed-time, I would like to notice before I go further—It is that there is neither precept, nor promise, for total absti-

nence in the bible, that abstainers are like the Judaizing teachers in early Christian times, who insisted on having Gentile converts circumcised; or, like the self-righteous ascetics of the middle age,—that they were attempting to improve the gospel plan of removing the miseries of mankind.

“This is a very serious charge, but it is a charge which has been brought against many a good cause, as well as total abstinence from strong drink. Why, the astronomy of Copernicus and Galileo was denounced as most unscriptural, and many of you, I daresay, have heard that Galileo was imprisoned for saying the earth went round the sun, whereas, the bible speaks of the sun’s rising and setting. Geology is often denounced, even yet, as a most dangerous and unholy science, because it seems to teach that the earth is much older than six thousand years. The use of chloroform has been declared unscriptural, in some instances as a sinful attempt to defeat the designs of a just retributive providence. I think the cause of total abstinence is in pretty good company.

“Now, perhaps, some injudicious advocate of total abstinence may have spoken of it, as if it were a substitute for the gospel, and may have given something like a ground for the charge of which I am speaking, but every one knows that a good cause is sometimes injured by its friends. Christianity itself has often suffered in this way. I do not say that there are any express precepts in the bible, in which

total abstinence from strong drink is enjoined, but is fair, natural, legitimate inference, not as good warrant as specific injunction? Are there not in the bible great general principles, to be applied to particular cases according to times and circumstances? Are there express precepts for the many benevolent schemes by which our age is happily distinguished, or do we ask such before we agree to support them? It is enough for me to believe that total abstinence from strong drink, is not condemned by the bible; to know that teetotalism is not in itself a sin; to know that there is no obligation on a man to drink. Does any one of you doubt this? There are some people who do not eat cheese, some who do not eat cabbage, some who do not eat tripe; but, would it not be monstrous to say, that in abstaining from these they commit sin; and why should it be a sin to abstain from whisky, or brandy, or wine?

“If you ask me for my scriptural authority, I refer you to Paul’s injunction to the jailer at Philippi, ‘Do thyself no harm.’ Medical men tell me, and my own experience tells me, (and I think every man of forty may, in such a matter, be his own doctor,) that a man in health does not need strong drink, but that he is fitter for either mind-work, or body-work without it. I have seen, and you have seen, many constitutions broken, many families impoverished, many fair characters blighted, many a young, strong, healthy man, brought to a premature and dishonoured grave, by means of strong drink.

“You may say it was not the *use*, but the *abuse* of the strong drink, that produced these terrible evils. Granted; but the victims did not become intemperate at once, they were moderate, decent, respectable people for years. But they had perhaps a strong tendency to drinking habits, you will say, and I am quite disposed to think that is possible, or even likely. There are folk who are disposed to an intemperate use of intoxicating drinks, just as there are people who have a natural tendency to disease of the brain, or of the lungs. Perhaps you have it, perhaps I have it; if we assume that we have no such tendency, we may be well on the way to drunkenness, before we learn our mistake; if we assume that we have such a tendency, and guard effectually against it, no practical evil will arise, even though the assumption should be erroneous. Let us do ourselves no harm then. Our intellects, our souls, our families, our character, our worldly substance, have been committed to our trust, let us take care of them. Is it not great folly in you, working men, spending that which might be of immense advantage to yourselves, and to your families, in buying food, and furniture, and fuel, and clothing, and books, and education—spending it on that which in health you do not need, and which may, as experience shows, prove the means and occasion of many great evils both to you and those connected with you?

“Do you ask my scriptural authority; I refer you again to Paul, who says, ‘Do good to all

men as you have opportunity'; 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others'; 'Use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another'. If I were to see a little child coming to a large stone, which was likely to make him stumble, I would lift the stone out of the way, and think I was doing what Paul bade me. Christian liberty is a good thing, and Christians should prize it very highly; but there is surely a difference between Christian liberty and the use which is made of it. Self-denial for the good of others is one grand characteristic of the morality of the New Testament. It is a duty indicated by example, and precept. Was not self-denial for the good of others written on every part of Christ's life? He said, Surely I might claim exemption from the tax that is levied to support my Father's house, but I waive my right, lest others should stumble. Paul, like his master, laboured, and suffered for others; and said, he would abridge his own liberty for others' good. He would eat no flesh while the world stood, lest men might think he ate flesh which had been offered in sacrifice to an idol. I am sure you will all feel the force of this, and that you often act in the same way. If you and your children were living near a railway, you would beware of teaching your children, by your example, to cross the line; you would rather go a little about to cross by the bridge. Now, I wish you to do the same by the drinking customs. Oh, think what a

misery for a family to have a drunken son, or a husband to have a drunken wife, or a child to have a drunken father, or mother! Are we not helping to make drunkards more numerous by our example? The minister takes his glass in the elder's house—after the prayer meeting, it may be—and the elder's sons see him doing so, and the elder's servants see him. He takes his one glass, and they are led to take two, and three, and four. It is a downhill road; and many poor drunkards can lay the blame of their ruin in part, at least, on their parents and friends.

“You ask me for my scriptural authority for total abstinence. I refer you to the numerous passages which command us to honour God with our souls, and bodies, our time, and substance, and all our talents. How much Sabbath-breaking is caused by drinking! How many are kept away from the house of God! How many, even if they attend church, are so dull, and sleepy, and stupid, that they get little good! How many are led to the commission of the most horrible forms of wickedness! Ministers and elders say that drinking, in one shape or another, has to do with almost every case of improper conduct among the members of churches. City missionaries say the drinking habits of the people are the greatest obstacles they have to contend with. Magistrates say that drunkenness is, to an enormous extent, the cause of poverty and crime. You may say it is human depravity; but what makes the most dreadful flood of depravity flow in this particular channel? Is

it not the drinking customs of our country? and are not these mainly kept up by decent moderate drinkers—men who, if really alive to the importance of the subject, might put these customs down, and with little sacrifice to themselves after all? Now, as I do not mean to detain you long, I shall close these remarks.

“If you are convinced that total abstinence from intoxicating drinks is a lawful and a likely means of doing good, either to yourselves or others, come forward and sign the pledge to-night; join that noble band who have sworn destruction to the greatest enemy of our country. If you are not yet convinced, think over what I have said to you; try total abstinence for a few weeks, and see how it suits your constitution, see whether your homes and hearths are brightened or darkened by it, and when I return to this district, I shall turn your attention to some other aspects of this important subject.”

This, as nearly as I can remember, is the sum and substance of the speech; and the speaker now sat down amidst applause. After a pause, and some whispering, a working man, about fifty, with a bald head, and tufts of thin, fair hair mingled with grey, about his temples, rose, and after a preliminary cough, during which there was a little laughing in the audience, said,

“Mr Chairman, Ye ken I'm no gien to specchifying, but I've been requested by some of my neebors here aboot me, to move a vote o' thanks to the gentleman for his address.

Drunkenness, sir, is a thing we hae a' o'er muckle to compleen o'. Gentle and semple are fashed and ruined by it. There are mony bairns and wives in the toon that hae naething for either back or belly, and are likely sune to be harled oot o' hoose and hauld, that might hae plenty o' fish, flesh, and fowl, but for that cursed drink. Muckle is the precious time and hard won siller that are spent in the yill hoose. Folks are eediwuts eneuch to tak their pay and spend it there, instead o' gicing it to the wife; and what's the consequence? they dinna get a dacent meal o' meat frae the tae week's end ti' the ither, but hae to pit up wi' taties and skim milk, or a blash o' thin tea, and in aither case it is a gey weak foundation for a hard day's work. I'm shair the landlord doon bye disna keep up his big sleek carcass on sic puir fare. We are glad to get a saut herring at a time, but he sits doon to a roast aff the spare rib, and we keep oor wives and weans in rags that he may hae his lasses learned to play on the piano, and his wife dressed in silks and satins.

"We're in a great dirdum whiles, and kick up a hully-baloo aboot taxes, but the heaviest tax is o' oor ain laying on. Drink maks paupers and puir's-rates, and taks frae us the siller that wad pay them. Robbie Burns says, 'tis aye the cheapest lawyer's fee to taste the barrel'; but Robbie, though often gey richt, was wrang there. I've seen mony mae quarrels begun bi' drink, than ever I saw ended bi' it. I tell ye lads, an' ye ken I've a richt to speak on the

subject, for the ne'er a drap o' drink has crossed my craig this aught year, it's far better to gang hame frae the shop to your wives and weans and read your buik, than to gang to the public hoose and sit and fuddle till eleven o'clock, and be turned oot when your siller's dune, or when Forbes M'Kenzie cries 'Time's up,' and then get a throughgaun frae Peggie when ye gang hame, or when ye're carried hame by some better-seasoned cask than yoursel'. My certie, the landlords have the best o't; they're wonderfu' pleasant as lang as ye hae onything to come an' gang on, but they'll gie ye the back o' their hand in a jiffey when the pouch is toom. But I maunna say muckle ill o' them, for the minister disna think shame o' them. May be he thinks he's like his Maister, when he feasts wi' publicans and sinners. I wonder if, when he taks his dinner wi' oor frien' doon bye, he maks worship afore he gangs hame to the manse. If he diz, will he ask God to bless his frien' in his worldly business—that is, that he may dispose o' mair o' the blue ruin, and spread mair misery through the neeborhood? I think if the deevil is a great roaring lion seeking men to devoor, the publican is the lion's provider; an' I dinna wonder, that when folk see ministers and elders sitting cheek by jowl wi' publicans, they think religion's a humbug, an' the ministry naething but a trade.

“I beg your pardon, Mr Chairman, but when I think hoo the scoondrels fatten on the bodies and sowls o' puir folk, my feelings get the better

o' me. And yet they're no sae muckle to blame after a'; as lang as there are slave-buyers, there will be slave-breeders; an' as lang as there are folk to buy drink, there will be folk to sell it.

"I move a vote of thanks to the speaker for his address, and I'm shair we wull a' be glad to see him shune back again."

The motion was seconded and carried unanimously, tongues, hands, and feet, giving a hearty response to these energetic sentiments.

CHAPTER XIV.

As we poured out in the clear moonlight across the little bridge, I heard such remarks as "He disna speak ill that ane;" "Auld Sandy pitches into them—the publicans caught it," &c.

When we got home, Mr Acroyd asked Mr Morgan what he thought of the meeting? He said, that he thought it a success, "that the meeting was suited to the speakers, and the speakers to the meeting."

I knew what Mr John's remark amounted to. The subject dropped, but next day as we were in the train returning to L——, I chanced to ask him if he had ever been at a total abstinence meeting before?

"Oh, often," said he, "I'm not in my present state of darkness without having sought enlightenment. The speaker last night was cool and

rational compared with some I have heard; I have heard it declared that alcohol is a poison just as arsenic is. They come often over the apostle Paul too—why don't they tell that he recommended his dearest Christian friend to take a little wine?"

"Ah," said I, "but that was as a medicine—no teetotaler objects to alcohol as a medicine."

"I can assure you they do," said he, "I have heard people warned at such a meeting as last night, against wine as a medicine, for if they began to take it they were sure to end by being unable to do without it, and thousands learned to drink in this very way—now Paul never hints this danger to Timothy. The truth is, men need it, just as they need food to keep them alive, and work to keep them out of mischief, they need something to cheer their lot; every nation has felt after it, and has got something in some shape; but teetotal orators always run away with the harrows; and another thing, they seem to think, that publicans, as they call them, are a class of ogres apart from human beings, who rejoice and chuckle over general drunkenness—the thing is absurd. Why, if I go into a shop and buy a knife, and go home and stab myself with it, would you upbraid the cutler, and prevent the sale of knives?"

"Yes, I would," I said, "if I lived in Japan, for instance, where suicide is the fashion, I would prevent the sale of weapons till the custom died out."

"I think you would be very right," he said, and laughed.

My sister soon became a general favourite at Honeycomb House; indeed, where was she not a favourite, with her most pleasant countenance and kind natural ways? She was an attentive listener to Mrs Morgan's stories of her trials and afflictions, and so earnest in her sympathy, that I think that lady must have been convinced, against her own persuasion, that I did not make her shortcomings matter of conversation even to my nearest friend. She was at Miss Morgan's bidding for excursions to town; she read with Fanny, and astonished her by the quantity of poetry she could repeat. Mr John brought numerous volumes out of his own bookcases into the drawing-room for their joint edification, and he remarked to Mary that her tastes were different from her sister's; "Your sister," he said, "likes argument, and is pretty good at giving a lecture."

"Rachel lecture!" said Mary, "I never heard her."

"That only shows that you don't need to be lectured—Lizzie and I both get over the knuckles from Miss Noble occasionally."

"I," said Lizzie, "am much obliged to Miss Noble, she is third dux in class of people I respect."

"Next to your papa and mamma—that's a high place Rachel," said Mary. Miss Morgan shrugged her shoulders.

Mr Morgan proposed that we should have a

party of young people; such a thing had not been at Honeycomb House since my reign began.

Our young servant Sarah, the girl who had opened the door to me on the evening of my arrival, and whom I had been trying to inoculate with total abstinence doctrines, was going to be married and leave us at this time. We were all sorry, for her smart, obliging ways had made her a general favourite in the house. She was really a good servant, although Mrs Morgan railed at her for dressing to ape her betters. I recollect on one occasion she came in to wait at dinner with a flounced gown on. Mrs Morgan's wrath fairly boiled over; she ordered her from the room to change her dress, and said, "No servant in her house should be permitted to wear flounces!" I had no faith whatever in sumptuary laws, but I spoke in a quiet, friendly way to the mortified damsel, who declared she was able to pay for flounces, and had as good a right to wear them as Mrs Morgan, "but leddies aye liket to keep servants doon."

"But," I said, "servants don't need to be kept down; a good servant is the most independent person I know; but what would any sensible person say that knew me for instance, if I were to dress in grand, expensive things, would any one think the more of me? Of course I have a right to wear them; by spending my last farthing I might pay for them, but I would not be well dressed; I would be very ill dressed, because I would be ridicu-

lously out of keeping with my income and situation. Common sense tells both you and me, that we had better dress like our places, and save our money for a rainy day—don't you think so?"

She was considerably smoothed down, and said, "Maybe it was a' very true, but a body liket to be neebor-like."

"Very well," I said, "but pick out sensible people for neighbours and take after them."

Miss Morgan dressed in a very plain, inexpensive style; her own good taste would have led her to do so, but apart from this, I think other reasons influenced her. I remember one Sunday we met on the street a family party, a stout portly papa and mamma, with a following of boys and girls, all decked out in such an outrageous combination of grandest grandeur, that I could not forbear raising my eyebrows in answer to Miss Morgan's glance; she smiled and said, "Spirits."

I said, "Is it—do you know?"

She said, "I don't know, but it is very like it."

An absurd grand vulgarity in dress, Miss Morgan thought smelt of the whisky-shop, and she eschewed it heartily.

Well, Sarah was to be married, and as her friends lived at a considerable distance—her mother was dead and her father had a second wife—I said to Mr Morgan, "Would he object to her being married in his house?"

"Not at all," he said; "it is a very good plan."

Mrs Morgan consented without approving, and proposed that tea should be the entertainment, but Mr Morgan said, people were not married every day, and they should have a good dinner, and we could have a party of young people in the evening.

So it was arranged. Sarah got some kind of gift from every one in the house. Mr Morgan gave her a very pretty wedding gown, and she told me to my intense mortification that he had sent two gallons of whisky to her new house to begin her house-keeping. I said, "I am sure Mr Morgan means to be kind Sarah, but I am very sorry indeed to hear it; it seems to me most mistaken kindness, and my advice to you is never to use that whisky except when it is ordered as medicine."

"Never fear, Miss Noble," said Sarah, "the whisky will be unco usefu'; when Tammas tellt me he said the maister was the real gentleman."

I once heard of a newly married pair being presented with a live boa constrictor with all its fangs complete; the brute needed to be fed, and there was a constant sense of danger—luckily it died. Now, when this whisky was done, it would need to be replaced, was there, or was there not a risk of evil? Yes, all the more that it was not felt. The reptile declared itself; but this wedding present came in the guise of friendly intercourse, hospitality, genial heartiness, yet it might one day sting like an adder, and bite like a serpent.

Dr M'Andrew married them. They really

looked well—Sarah in her nicely fitting new gown, and the bridegroom in his black coat with a white satin favour pinned on it. He was tallish and rather slender, with red hair, whiskers and beard, (beards had just come in then, and I think Sarah was proud of it), his face was pleasant and intelligent; altogether I thought life promised well for them. Fanny was bride's maid. Dr M'Andrew stayed to dinner and set the example of drinking to the health of the young couple. They soon left for their new home, where some days after I called and found Sarah looking very pleased and happy, everything about her in her little comfortable house, neat, and new, and bright. Her husband was at his work; he was a joiner, clever at his business, with good wages, and constant employment. Sarah produced cake, and said, "it was a queer thing not to bring out the bottle, but she supposed I wouldn't taste?"

"Certainly not," I said, "and I am very sorry that you and your husband have not seen fit to begin life as teetotalers."

"Weel," she said, "Tammas said it may be wasna a bad thing, but he didna see the neecessity for't."

I came away sorry and discouraged, heartily wishing they might never see the necessity of it, when it might possibly be too late.

Our evening party was not a very numerous one, but we all enjoyed ourselves. We had the dining-room cleared for dancing. When dancing had been proposed, Mr Morgan hesitated.

"Weren't three of the M'Andrews coming; he wasn't sure that the doctor approved of dancing; he had his own doubts about it too?"

I said "There are worse things, Mr Morgan, than the kind of dancing we shall have; you know there's a time to dance, so we'll not ask Dr M'Andrew's opinion."

"You are a bold, young lady, Miss Noble," said John Morgan.

"Oh! Mr John," said Mary, "do you not approve of dancing—I am so fond of dancing."

"Well," he said, "I'll tell you a secret. When I was at the dancing school I was the very best dancer in it—the young ladies used to fight which to have me for a partner."

"Then we may look forward to a few duels to-night," said Lizzie. "Miss Noble, if you need a second count on me; we'll be secure from interruption in the back green, choice of weapons, pokers or rolling pins."

So we danced, and danced very well too. Dr England—who came, although he understood our party was to be somewhat juvenile—chose Fanny for his partner, John Morgan took my sister, David the eldest Miss M'Andrew, and Lizzie fell to the lot of Mr M'Andrew, a tall, slim lad, with narrow shoulders and a long neck, a bird-like profile, a voice amusing itself with a ridiculous squeak before it broke forth into a deep bass; his feet and hands seemed to have hurried their growth that they might be sure to be ready for him when he should be a man; and his movements were not the most agile, but

he made up for that by the extreme gravity with which he laid his whole mind to the business in hand. I didn't think Lizzie felt proud of her partner, and Dr England seemed amused at her chagrin. We had young Mr Brown of Leerielaw with us, too, for the first time. I did not think his mother's praise of him a bit overcharged; he certainly impressed one very favourably, and as our intimacy with him ripened we thought all the more of him. As might be expected he did not dance, for the very good reason, he said, he couldn't; and, indeed, dancing did not seem the most appropriate employment for him; in size he was almost colossal, and to have set him a dancing would have been like using a steam engine to move a lady's fan. But I think I never saw any one who laid himself out more heartily for enjoyment; it was a sight to see him laugh; he threw himself back on his chair, all the timbers of which groaned and creaked with the strain, and just "guffawed." Then, at supper we had the remnants of the bridecake, and he got the thimble, which he held up, and stuck on his little finger, declaring he didn't think it would ever come off, which was a grand joke for the smaller fry, and we older people being in the humour, did not feel ourselves too wise to laugh at humbler jokes than that. The crooked sixpence fell to Dr England's lot, and he said if he had had his choice it would have been that—if ever he married, he would marry money.

"Oh, Dr England," said Fanny, "I couldn't have believed that of you; it *is* very shocking."

"Shocking!" he said; "you foolish little thing, what's shocking about it? Depend upon it, there's nothing like money."

"I am sure," she said, "I don't think so, and neither does Lizzie."

"You are mistaken there, Fan," said Miss Morgan, "I think money is a very nice thing; I wish I was rich."

"But if you were, you would not marry Dr England," pursued Fanny, "for you would know it was your money he wanted."

"No, certainly not," said Lizzie, with, I dare-say, unconscious emphasis.

The doctor's head was bent suddenly over his plate. I thought he was hardly in such good spirits for the rest of the evening.

And it was on this night that, for the first time during my sister's visit, which had now extended to six weeks, the possibility crossed my mind that John Morgan might be attracted by her. It did not strike me as at all a pleasant contingency, why, I could hardly say to myself. I had nothing to urge against him; I liked him, still I knew I could not give my sister to him heartily; if it had been Dr England, now, it would have been altogether different. I comforted myself by thinking that I was very likely mistaken—a man might stick to a young lady's side a whole evening, and even look unutterable things, and nothing come of it—her visit would end in a few days, and it might be long enough before they met again. When you have only one thing to give away, and that

the very best of its kind, and above all precious to you, you feel that it is not every one to whom you are willing to surrender it.

During the evening, Mr Morgan had appeared greatly to enjoy the happiness of his family; Mrs Morgan had gone to her room with a headache, but as we were breaking up, she came down to say good night. I was shocked to see, when she entered the room, that she had been drinking—despite my vigilance, she had secured a small supply at dinner-time, and there she was, half maudlin; she could stand and walk, but her utterance was thick; and as Mr Brown was going away, she put her arms round his neck and attempted to kiss him, from which I did not wonder to see him shrink; and if possible, more absurd still, she went through the same ceremony with Dr England! He stood it in a way I gave him credit for; and then turning to Lizzie, whose face was scarlet, he kindly wished her good night, and said, "Where's Fan? Tell her that maybe I'm not so sordid as she thinks, the little simpleton." But on her mother's entrance Fanny had disappeared; she never could stand a scene of this kind.

One would have thought, for the sake of her children, Mrs Morgan might have denied herself for once, and not have crowned their evening by such a shameful spectacle, but no consideration ever had any weight with her.

CHAPTER XV.

IF I had been alone, I would, no doubt, have had a visit from Miss Morgan in my own room that night, as was her habit when she wished to think aloud; as it was, she drew me into her room when I was passing her door, and said, "Wasn't it very shocking? and no time or season makes any difference—how I pity poor papa—what will your sister think?"

"That's the least of it," I said.

"So it is," said she; "and I daresay she'll not think worse of it than possible, for she is an amiable creature; if she and I could be mixed well together, it would improve us both—she is too amiable, and I am too much the other thing, but the minister, to be, of New Broom likes things very very sweet."

"Hush, hush; joke about any one but Mary," I said and hurriedly left her.

Then the idea had occurred to her too, so that I couldn't blame my own imagination for it wholly; I felt very uncomfortable, and as luckily we can't entertain equal anxiety about two vexations, or trials, at once, this put Mrs Morgan's misdemeanour quite out of my head.

When I reached my room, Mary was sitting in a brown study, I put my hand upon her shoulder, and said, "Sisterkin, what art thou thinking of?"

"Oh, nothing," said she; "Rachel, what in the world possessed Mrs Morgan to-night?"

"You have no idea?"

"Well, if it were possible, I would think she was somewhat drunk."

"Exactly. It's that failing of hers that makes it desirable that they should have a person like me to watch her, you see she sometimes outwits me."

"Rachel!"

"It's quite true; it's just what I'm here for."

"It must be horridly unpleasant. She must be dreadfully ashamed to meet her family afterwards."

"You and I would think so."

"And such a delightful family, too; I don't know which of them I like best."

"David, probably; he strikes me as being a very nice young man—the flower of the flock."

"Do you think so?" in a tone of subdued surprise. "Then, what do you think of his brother?"

"I think he has fine eyes, and very fine hands."

"Rachel! you are satirical."

"And his mother drinks, and his father keeps whisky-shops."

"Rachel, you're positively savage—what is the meaning of it; he is certainly more to be pitied than blamed, because his mother drinks, and every one doesn't think it wrong to sell wine and spirits: I don't."

"All I can say is, I hope neither my interests nor those of any one dear to me, will ever be bound up with the interests of that trade."

"Rachel, do you know any harm of John Morgan?"

"None."

"Do you know any good?"

"Much."

"Do you think he will be an efficient minister?"

"Most likely."

"Now Rachel, tell me true; if he was to ask you to marry him would you do it?"

"Most assuredly not."

"How glad I am! I thought—I fancied."

"That I was in love with him?—not a bit—I don't even look up to him."

"But then, you are so clever—he says you are so clever—sharp and practical."

"Ah then, if *he* says it, I must be clever, although I never was accused of it before, except in the very humble line of getting up good dinners, and keeping an eye on furniture."

"Rachel, Rachel, he has asked me to be his wife."

I absolutely started—"You—you?"

"I have promised."

"Then there's nothing more to be said; God bless you, sister, and him." And we said nothing more. She fell asleep with tears on her face. I never slept. But of all the myriad throng of thoughts and feelings that crowded out and in my brain that night, I set nothing down here.

Next morning, when I went into the breakfast-room, John only was there; he said, "Mary has told you?"

"Yes," I said.

"And you approve, Rachel?"

"What if I don't approve—will you go separate ways peacefully?"

"We'll not speak of that—"

Just then Mary entered soberly and quietly, but with an unmistakable glow on her face; they came both up to me; I said, "Children, let a venerable relative give you her blessing," and with a laugh was passed over what to me at least was a very bitter moment. The loss was all mine, the gain was all John Morgan's; what fell to Mary's share may yet be told.

Mr Morgan received the news with great heartiness, and said he could desire nothing more to his mind, and that he would do all in his power to make his son and his son's wife comfortable. Mrs Morgan, with the fine feeling which generally distinguished her, took occasion, obliquely and indirectly to intimate that she thought her son was marrying far below himself in mating with the sister of his father's housekeeper. I retaliated in far the most telling way, by taking not the slightest notice of her remarks. With head and heart, I disapproved of this marriage. Whatever other people might think—and I daresay any one that knew both, thought it an "excellent settlement" for her—I believed that Mary was too good for John Morgan. Mr Morgan had offered, whatever their income might be, to add two hundred a year to it. How was I, with my conscientiously-

established convictions, to pray for a blessing on their basket and their store?

I couldn't have uttered that prayer, but the swearing, and shouting, and fighting I had heard in the shop in Low Street would have wrung in my ear like the mockery of eldritch laughter. Then my feelings—I was very jealous—six weeks ago I had been all in all to Mary; now I well believed I was chiefly thought of because of my talent for arrangement. I was not very old, comparatively, at this time, but I was sure that I had reached the *ne plus ultra* of female human wisdom; still, I did not know that in time this state of matters would right itself both in her and me. With head and heart, I said “No” to this marriage, and I did not think I should ever be wiser. I have found out my mistake. Although we don't shed our experience year by year as the snake does its skin, yet, year by year, we get a new coating of it. Blessed be the Greeks for reverencing age—with them it was a chance virtue; Christianity makes it a certain one. Reverence the hoary head; reverence even worthless age, because only of the burden of years it bears on its stooping shoulders. I know no sight on earth more touching, unless it be a neglected little child, than an old white-headed man drunk.

The thought of this marriage began actually to pick the flesh from my bones, till it occurred even to my complete wisdom, that when a thing is inevitable, the best plan is to make up one's mind to it as soon as may be; also, I began

to think that I might be ascetic—a little too far reaching—in my anxiety about my sister.

It was October when John and I visited West Valley; on New Year's-day we all sped thither again; and in Mr Acroyd's house they were married. If it were well done, certainly it was done quickly. Mrs Morgan permitted herself to go, with immense reluctance, merely to countenance Mary; the truth was that, as she had entirely debarred herself from society, it was a pleasure to her, as to a child, to get to any kind of party whatever; besides, she had a keen curiosity about every thing and person. She went sober, and came home sober, and, I have little doubt, impressed the Acroyds with the feeling that a sweeter, more affectionate, sensible, considerate mother-in-law never graced the roof-tree of a Scottish manse.

John Morgan had been licensed (I declare even now that word takes my thoughts more naturally to the other trade) some time more than a year, and, lucky man, a parish awaited him, and, more lucky still, every person in it was ready to welcome him.

When I first visited New Broom—I shall stick to that familiar name, it will do as well as another—I felt inclined to doubt whether general belief had been correct in laying the site of Paradise in Syria; here were the rivers, here was the plain—here were the mountains, and here the gardens, and, in addition, a good-sized, comfortable, tasteful house. The reader

sees I might go on much farther with the parallel, but I don't incline to hunt a simile to death, so I will *not* say, that here were Adam and Eve—but I will say that there came a whisper to me in the corner of the garden, while I dozed away a little time there, waiting till our neatly-appointed phaeton, with its handsome high-stepping horse, and the youth with the band about his hat and white gloves, should be ready to take us our daily drive—I will say, there came a whisper to me from the Low Street of L——, which said, “Who pays for that?” The noise and the dirt, the old man and his onions, the wretched women, the child dancing—aye, that was a kind of dancing to be put down—suspended by the hair of its head, passed between me and—

“ — all the pomp that fills,
The circuit of the summer hills.”

Mary had been a florist from childhood, and it was curious to see how John took with enthusiasm to gardening—useful and ornamental; already he was planning to compete at the flower and vegetable show of the district. His garden had abundant sun, south walls, and cosy shelter; he had got a green-house too, and in this favoured spot he worked with his own hands—not, however, without good, big, thick gloves; if I had been in Mary's place he would not have been long of being laughed out of that, but such a profane idea never entered Mary's head, and in the pulpit, his hand shone from his

snowy wristband, fine and white as ever. Now, I was not the least impatient of this—I would gladly allow every human being a reasonable share of palpable and conspicuous weaknesses.

Fanny accompanied me on this visit, and with pure air, daily exercise, and being out from under the home cloud, she actually blossomed into a different creature. One day she said to me, "Oh, Miss Noble, it is good to be here." When I looked at her, there was a flush of colour on her usually pale face, and a singularly sweet smile played over it—no serpent had been whispering at her ear.

I staid over two Sundays, and so had an opportunity of judging of my brother-in-law's ministrations. He was very popular. His church was well filled, and considering that the congregation was chiefly composed of people who worked in the open air six days a week, comparatively few went to sleep. His discourses were more addressed to the heart than the head, and were something more than a little ambitious and flowery—time would remedy the latter faults. I had been afraid that his style and manner would be an imitation of Dr M'Andrew's, or of another preacher's whom he admired, and I was relieved to find that they were his own, natural and unaffected, not put on, or taken off, with his gown and band. A person no way interested in him would have said that he wasn't a bad preacher—a person much interested in him would have said that he was a remarkably good preacher. I could see that, in

his work out of the pulpit, he was very successful and happy; he had a natural turn for it, which no amount of erudition could have given him—the ready sympathy, the soothing voice, the interested look, are always welcome to rich or poor, in time of trial, and these John Morgan had. I had never doubted that Mary would be a helpmeet for him, and she was in her department as popular as he was in his.

But they had no total abstinence society in New Broom. Fanny, who was an older teetotaler than I, spoke of this circumstance to me, and regretted it; she was the only one of the family who saw eye to eye with me on the subject.

"However," she said, "drunkenness does not seem such a crying evil here as in L——, and I am thankful that John at least is not in papa's business." Poor Fanny! that business struck its very fangs into her soul and conscience, and poisoned all the blessings of her life. I was glad to leave her behind me at New Broom, when I returned to L——.

I think I suggested to John and his wife, that if I were in their place, I would dispense with the youth of the white gloves, with the horse, and the "one-horse chay," and live within the income I earned myself. But John saw no reason why he should; and, of course, Mary didn't either. And also, I said, "I wouldn't have wine on the table every day."

John smiled, and said, "That part of our house-keeping is not expensive; our modest

cellar is supplied free of cost. But Mary," he went on, "our sister Rachel has a corner of her nature in which she keeps a little pet private craze, which very often escapes from confinement."

"Well," I said, "when it does escape, it seems alike powerless for good or evil."

"But, Rachel, it must be a dreary thing to be always thinking of drunkards and how to mend them."

"Considerably less dreary than to be thinking of drunkards and how to make them."

"But why think of it?" said Mary. "Let us convert people—make them Christians—and we cut the roots of that, and every sin."

"Precisely my view, Mary," said her husband.

"Then," said I, "you think no Christian ever fell—was ever drawn gently and pleasantly into the whirlpool from which he could not escape, let him struggle as he might."

"I don't know," said Mary; "I hope not—it is a dreadful thought."

Yes, it was; and silence fell upon us. We were sitting on a garden-seat in front of the house, the summer afternoon making drowsiness all about us; we sat as if spell-bound for a time.

"—We might have come into a land
In which it seemed always to be—afternoon."

We were roused by Fanny, who came in from a walk, and said, "Why, are you still sitting here?" As we went in, we turned to look up at the mountains, and down through the strath,

and I said, "I will tell Dr England, if his eyes and soul are hungry he has only to come and stand on your door-step and be filled."

"Do," said John; "I hope we shall see him very soon, and very often."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE second summer of my stay at Honeycomb House, we did not go to country quarters. Mr Morgan said that for himself and David, they had plenty of change, and preferred having the house open, and us at home, and we women folk, he said, might go two at a time to New Broom. Wonderful to relate, Mrs Morgan heartily approved of a plan not of her own suggesting. I think she was averse to another five months' course of Leerielaw, which would likely have been the alternative. Lizzie was delighted with the arrangement, and said that if we all liked to go together, she would be so glad to keep house, she wouldn't feel a bit dull, &c. So I had not long returned from the visit I have been speaking of, when I set off again with Mrs Morgan. I expected no enjoyment whatever. I was a detective in plain clothes, who was never to lose sight of the "party"; I was a freeman chained to a slave; I was a keeper to watch incipient madness. If persons in these delightful situations enjoy scenery,

quote poetry, and have minds at ease, it was more than I could, or had. Mrs Morgan tired of New Broom sooner than I expected. I was very glad, for we had not entered the house door till the shadow of anxiety fell on Fanny, and it was a relief to me when I got my charge safe home again. Fanny remained at New Broom.

It was towards evening when we arrived in L——, and Lizzie received us with marked kindness—so marked that I thought she must be heartily sick of living alone, and really she looked pale, and out of sorts; but she said she was quite well, and had not wearied at all in our absence. As I expected, she came into my room at night, with her hair-brush as usual, and began with customary abruptness—"Miss Noble, I wish I could be sure that you would always stay here."

"Why?" I said.

"I think you are such a comfort to papa—I am so sorry for papa—and I would feel easier about mamma, too, if I were sure you would stay."

"Well," I said—after the manner of respectable mentors, who generally answer some heartfelt anxiety with a decent, true observation, that makes you wish them at Jericho—"well, you know, there's nothing sure in this world."

"I know something that's pretty sure, I think."

"And what may that be?"

"Oh, you'll know all in good time. How does

John get on, and Mary, and what's Fanny about? I wish she had come back with you; I would like much to give her a hearty kiss."

"Fanny is enjoying herself, and Mary and John get on very well; as there's nothing to hinder, the sooner you go to see them the better."

"Nothing to hinder? that's as may be—and Rachel, darling, now tell me true, have they, oh have they a teetotal society, and did you give a lecture on the subject in the village?"

"Of course, and John was in the chair, and Fanny raised the tunes."

"And Mary—what did she do? snuff the candles? Charles Brown has been here pretty frequently of late. I was telling him you would be lecturing, and that he should go and help you."

"Yes, he has the cause at heart."

"I am sure he might have fifty causes at heart, if his heart is big in proportion to his body."

"He is not a person to be sneezed at, Miss Morgan."

"I wasn't sneezing, Miss Noble, but he could stand a gale unmoved."

"Have you seen Dr England lately?"

"Some time last week, I think. He has grown curiously uncertain in his manner, the doctor; sometimes he is as sharp and sour as vinegar, and other times you would think he had been melting himself with sugar-candy in some of his pots or pans. I like Dr England; I never heard him say a thing that had the shadow of falseness in it."

"You have told me before that you didn't like him."

"Oh, very likely, one can't always kiss the rod. I declare I think the doctor and you are the best friends we have; did you feel very much when you left West Valley to come here?"

"A good deal, but it wasn't an irrevocable step you know."

"Still one's spirit feels dashed in looking at things and places possibly for the last time; but, I am keeping you up for no end, I may as well go"—still she lingered—"did Fanny send any message?"

"Her love."

"She is a good little creature, and very fond of you, Miss Noble; I think if she were in distress you could console her."

"I hope I'll not need to try my power soon."

"Then, I'm off—I cannot go; I must not stay—look back, I dare not look that way; and so on, and so on. Good night, Rachel; good night."

Next day, Mr Morgan went from home. Mrs Morgan lay in bed, although so far as I could judge, in perfect health—she sometimes did lie in bed for a day or two for no other reason except that she liked to do so—and Miss Morgan went into town. I felt dull and languid. As I sat alone in the drawing-room, my eye fell on the empty stand that used to contain Mrs Morgan's watch, and once more I began to turn over in my mind the curious circumstances of that robbery; the "Lizzie, Lizzie," which

sounded in my ears now, as distinctly as when I heard the words spoken; then, linked to that, came the terrible night at Leerielaw, and I saw the travel-stained, shabby-genteel-looking figure of the man who escaped with his life, lying in the moonlight by the water's edge, grasping the stump of thorn. I had heard that man speak, I was almost sure of the identity of these two voices. Miss Morgan had not told any untruth about the matter, but I was well convinced she had not told the whole truth, and the valuable brooch which I knew she wore that night, I had never seen since. I was certain she hadn't it, but she had never mentioned having lost it, and I didn't doubt that it had gone with the contents of her purse; I had seen her have a considerable sum that morning, I saw her thrust something into the man's hand, and next day she was penniless, she had to borrow for some trifle she wanted. Who could this man be that had such a hold on her, and why was she so painfully anxious to keep the matter a profound secret? Guilt of any kind I could not connect with her frank and fearless bearing, I always fell back on that conviction with unmeasurable satisfaction; still, it was a painful subject. That she was in some way in the power of a miscreant, that nobody was to know why or how, were facts that by no ingenuity I could get rid of; and I was worried by doubts of how far I did right in concealing anything I knew, at her request.

I was still thinking of all this when Dr England

came in. It was very seldom, indeed, that the doctor called of a forenoon, unless professionally, but I at once concluded he came to hear what were the news from New Broom, so I gave him the whole in the minute feminine fashion men like so well—although, of course, they consider it trifling, in the extreme. I don't do this often, for what is the use of boring a man with what is certainly beneath his attention, but the reader knows that Dr England was a favourite of mine—I liked to humour him. I tried to do justice to the feeding view, and gave him John Morgan's cordial invitation.

"Is Miss Morgan going soon?" he asked.

"I was telling her, last night, that the sooner she goes the better, but I don't know when she may go, she is sometimes a little capricious."

"She is not a *little* capricious—a curious change has come over her of late."

"Indeed! I'm not aware of it," I said.

"That's odd," he said. "Don't you see it—a deeper note—just a more tender chord, as it were, in her voice and manner."

"Really, I have not noticed," I said.

"There's something about her I don't understand," he said half-musingly.

"That I don't doubt."

"That Mr Brown was here pretty frequently, while you were away."

"So she was telling me, last night."

"Do you think it can be connected with him?"

"It? what?"

"This change in her manner I was speaking of—do you think that he—that she——"

"Do you mean, do I think there is a love affair imminent? It is too good news to be true."

"Good news? why, what good could there be in it—he—a mere raw, unlicked student——"

"He may be raw, and he is a student; but I can't help thinking highly of him—there seems to be a power about all he says and does."

"Oh, I daresay—so there is a power about the porters at G——, who run across the gangways of the steamers with immense bags of meal on their shoulders."

I could not help being amused at this stoical man, who thought beauty less than nothing and vanity, so thoroughly, as I thought, betraying himself.

"Be that as it may," I said, "you may take my word for it, Miss Morgan is fancy free so far as he is concerned."

"I am not so sure of that," he said.

Now, I knew this remark was made, with the intention of drawing out my reasons for so thinking, and I wickedly resolved not to be so drawn out. If the doctor had said, "Do tell me your reasons, Miss Noble, I'm much interested," then indeed, I would have taken some pains to convince him; as it was, I made no remark.

At length he said, "Do you know, Miss Noble, that Mr Brown was here nearly every day, while you were away, and that Miss Morgan returned his visits, at his lodgings?"

I opened my eyes pretty wide—"No, certainly, I did not know that."

"But I know," said he, "and I think you should take an opportunity of speaking to Miss Morgan about it—she is a girl that will do anything that comes into her head; I don't think she will do anything wrong, but she may do something very foolish."

"I think that possible enough; but Mr Brown is not the person to lead her to do a foolish thing. What she went to his lodgings for, I can't say, but it wasn't for the sake of his company, of that I am sure; just give me credit for some faint power of observation."

"Humph!" said the doctor, "Mr Brown is human, I suppose."

"Yes, and a remarkably good specimen of humanity; but I'll get to the bottom of this—I'll speak to Lizzie, and if I think fit, I'll speak to Mr Brown too."

"Take care how you deal with Miss Morgan—do your spiriting gently."

"I'll leave it to you to do, if you like; she says you and I are the best friends she has."

I did not think that being classed with me in the list of Miss Morgan's friends had a particularly animating effect on the doctor. He went away soon after, leaving me with an additional perplexity to weave into the web of my meditations. However, this was a puzzle of which I was not afraid. I dreaded the other, but I was quite sure that anything in which Charles Brown was mixed up would stand the light of

day, besides, I had only to wait a little and I would hear all about it.

I know many celebrated persons have had presentiments; perhaps commonplace beings like myself need not expect to be singled out in that way; at any-rate, I sat that day in the drawing-room of Honeycomb House without the faintest sense of anything remarkable impending, evil or otherwise. The mice hadn't quitted the house either, for one came out and played about the rug so prettily, that I sat quite quiet and amused myself watching it, as it made a hearty little *tiffin* of a crumb, with its ears erect, its body cosily drawn up, and its comic specks of eyes glancing continually at me; this was my employment, when, could I have guessed what was passing elsewhere, I must have rushed to the rescue. But that may be happening on the other side of the wall which shall give a dismal colouring to our whole lives, and we know it not.

Late in the afternoon, when I was every minute expecting Miss Morgan, I heard the postman's ring, and a letter was brought to me. As it is lying beside my desk now, looking a little old and faded, I will just copy it. I wonder what the writer of it would think of it at this distance of time, if I were to show it to her? Here it is.

“L——, Tuesday Forenoon.

“MY DEAR RACHEL,—When you get this, you will very likely be sitting in the drawing-

room window, looking for me coming in at the gate, and I will be—what do you think?—married! There now, the cat is out of the bag. I was quite sure that even if I had asked papa, he never would have consented; so of course, Rachel, you know that it is a highly imprudent thing I have done, but I thought if it were fairly over, papa would come round, and I count upon your good offices to bring this about, and to console people in general under such a heavy loss.

“I was terribly sorry to vex papa, but I couldn't help it.

“I can see you and Dr England laying your wise heads together, and deploring my folly, but just hang up your opinions, if you please, till you know my husband. His heart is as big as Charles Brown's, and his brain is in proportion, and—what shall I say—he is the omnibus conductor who stole my handkerchief: he did steal it, and he has it yet. He got a substitute to-day, but he will be at work again to-morrow, for he says he must not quit one situation till he sees a prospect of another. I don't at all like it, but I have given in, so that you see we have a few grains of common-sense between us. He is better off than papa once was, and of course he will rise in the world; but meantime I think it will be very amusing living upon twenty shillings a week. I know the price of provisions very well, and how far money will go. I have just hired a piano, and sent it to our lodgings, I do so want to let him hear me play and sing.

We shall be very happy. You must come and see us. I was sorely tempted to tell you last night, but contrived to hold my tongue, which was as well, as who knows what you might have thought it your duty to do?

“George is well up in the three R's, and, what I am really glad of, spells with perfect correctness—it is so difficult for a grown-up person to learn spelling. He makes little blunders in odd and end kind of things, which amuse me, but I can easily teach him. I don't expect it will be long before I am at Honeycomb House again as a visitor. Mamma will be shocked, I daresay. Do comfort papa and Fanny,—John has a comforter, you know,—and I expect Davie will survive it.—Dear Rachel, your most affectionate friend,

“(When you get this) LIZZIE MYLES.”

The utter dismay I felt when I read this letter, I can not describe. I read it standing; I took a chair, passed my hand over my eyes, and felt utterly confounded. Mr Morgan was from home, and as for Mrs Morgan, all I could expect by telling her, was a cataract of words bewailing herself, so I had no immediate relief by sharing my news.

If she had only told me last night! Then I remembered all she had said, which I had thought nothing of at the time, but which stood out now as clearly as prophecy that has been fulfilled—even Logan's lines were not a mere idle quotation then, but pointed to the occasion.

She was married by this time, so nothing could be done. If the man's character were good, it might not turn out such a wretched affair after all, but everything depended on that; as for her estimate of him, it did not weigh a pin's point with me. But what kind of man would take a girl from her home of affluence, to share poverty with which she was wholly unfitted to contend, if he cared for her? or, was he speculating on what her friends might feel compelled to do for them? To think that she should have so utterly thrown herself away, so young, so everything that might have adorned any man's house. Then I thought of Dr England. That was over. If I had been correct in my suspicions, how would he take this intelligence? Strange that he should have been so unfortunate, a man who I thought might almost have commanded success; and that she, with her good taste and sharp sense, should have done a thing so wholly foolish, not to use a harsher term. Yet her sense was very inexperienced. Why, her letter was almost childish, a curious mixture of shrewdness and simplicity; and she never had a mother's care; rather that wretched mother had made the home of her family almost intolerable, and this was the fruit she was reaping.

It surely wouldn't be to meet this man, Lizzie had gone to Charles Brown's lodgings? No, that was out of the question; and I was almost as sure that there could be no connection between this George Myles and that other

questionable mystery in which she was mixed up. This man Myles had been in his present situation ever since I came to L——, I knew, and that said something for him; so far he must have conducted himself and the omnibus decently; but that other man whose voice I could have recognised anywhere, and whom I had seen so distinctly, though only for a few minutes, belonged I hardly doubted to the race of ne'er-do-weels.

I read her letter again, and it flashed on me that perhaps after all it was a hoax, that she was amusing herself at my expense, and that she would be in, in a little, to enjoy my discomfiture. I really clung to this idea, it seemed so incredible that she should have taken such an extraordinary and decided step.

I heard the gate swing, and looked eagerly out, it was only Mr Brown—could he be the bearer of any tidings? But as he came past the window, I saw his face had its usual everyday look, and when he came in his manner was no way ruffled. He must have thought me peculiar; I couldn't speak to him of what filled my thoughts, and I could not withdraw my thoughts from the subject, so that I did not help him much in his efforts at conversation. At length I said abruptly, "So Miss Morgan has been visiting you at your lodgings?"

"She hasn't been visiting me," he said.

"She has been in the house where you lodge?"

"Yes—did she tell you?"

"No, she didn't tell me, but I know it."

"I didn't think any one knew—yes, she was twice there."

"What took her there?"

"Well, I'm not at liberty to say—she particularly asked me not to speak of it."

"Odd," I said, "if she made you her confidant, she might have done the same by me."

"She did not make me her confidant—her errand was a good one; I admired her for doing it, and the way she did it."

"She certainly doesn't let her left hand know what her right hand does—she probably carries that too far."

"She may have good reasons for it."

So when Mr Brown left, I found myself just as wise as I was before. In other circumstances, I might have felt annoyed, but every smaller feeling was swallowed up in the constantly recurring sense of wretchedness, in thinking of Lizzie and her unaccountable folly. I saw nothing but misery that could come out of it; I even got the length of pitying the man, married to a girl who had been accustomed to spend not less than his whole income on her own little personal expenses, and who had never used her hands for any harder work than "doing" her hair, or trimming a bonnet.

CHAPTER XVII.

AND Lizzie had laid on me the burden of telling her father what she had done. I knew not how I could convey to him the news that his daughter, of whom he was so fond and proud, had left him, and in such a way. I wondered how it would affect him; whether he would be unrelentingly angry, or grieved and stricken. If the offence had been that of any one but her, I knew how angry and obstinate he could be; but, then, she was his daughter and his idol.

I heard the clang of the outer gate again, and I saw Mr Morgan enter. A glance told me that I was spared the pain of telling him what had occurred. He had heard it already; that was to be seen in his gait. He looked feeble and careworn. He came in and sat down and said never a word. I think if Lizzie could have imagined him as he looked at that moment, she never could have done it. It was touching to see the brisk self-complacency so thoroughly crushed out of him. I felt it would have been marvellously impertinent to break in upon his grief. So I sat in the window recess and offered no remark. At last he groaned faintly, and said, "Miss Noble, had you any idea of this?"

"Not the slightest. If I had you might have been sure I would have let you know."

"Well, I believed I could depend on you, but women are sometimes so confoundedly romantic."

If he could have laid the blame on any other

person it would have been an immense consolation to him.

"She has managed it very cleverly," he said.

I said nothing, but thought it curious from what singularly unpromising materials, a parent could extract satisfaction.

"I got a letter from her at the office," he said.

"And I got one here."

"Let me see yours, will you?"

I gave it to him. I saw the tear standing in his eye as he glanced it over.

"She's sorry to vex me. Poor thing, poor thing. She knows the price of provisions, and it will be amusing to live on twenty shillings a week. The amusement will be short-lived, I doubt. He's as well off as I once was, that's true enough, and it's difficult to learn spelling. She's right there, too, as I know. I'll tell you what I'll do, Miss Noble. I'll set him up in one of my shops. I'm opening a new one in a good situation. I'll give him it. I'll give him a salary, and if he makes more of it, it will be his own. It's a confoundedly better start than I had. If the right stuff's in him they may do yet." He half smiled. It was a desperately bitter pill to swallow, let him sugar-coat it how he might.

Could any good accrue from my saying that I did not think either the start, or the course, or the goal at all desirable? I didn't think so, especially in Mr Morgan's present mood, so I remained silent. He went up stairs, and I am sure I pitied him, thinking of the interview

he would have with his wife; but perhaps he did not pity himself as I did, for it is a surprising thing, a strong personal affection. It will live where anything else would die. Nay, it is like some animals which you may violently cut in two, when, lo! both ends sprout, and instead of destroying, you find that you have only doubled them.

I took up Lizzie's letter again. I seemed to see a gleam of comfort in it; the man was determined to stick honestly to his work, and he had returned to it against his wife's will; she had "given in;" it had not been her habit, as long as I had known her, to give in, and I thought it said something for his spirit of independence, both in relation to his wife and his wife's friends.

I was glad that Mrs Morgan saw it necessary to tide over the first night of this calamity in bed; it was a vast deal less trying for me than if she had been down stairs harping continually on her daughter's folly and ingratitude, as she said. It did not seem to strike her that there had been any failure of duty on her own part.

Some miserable days passed. I would have gone to see Lizzie, but I could never leave Mrs Morgan so long alone. Mr Morgan, after the first outburst of feeling, did not refer to the subject again. The mortification and disappointment seemed to grow on him rather than lessen. David, too, was terribly chagrined; he loved his sister, and was proud of her, as they all were; and I daresay, had always expected

that she would make a good, if not a great, marriage; and to think that his brother-in-law was standing on the step of an omnibus!

Mr Morgan and I were sitting one day after dinner, when, chancing to look from the window, I saw, coming over the gravel, a woman, tall and elderly, indeed probably nearer sixty than fifty, with clean-cut, handsome features, dark, alert, grey eyes; she was dressed in a decent black silk bonnet, a fine checked worsted shawl, clean and fresh, as if new out of the fold, a dark merino gown, which clung round her ankles in classic fashion—not an inch of crinoline was there. She advanced to the door without hesitation, and a minute after the servant ushered her into the room without giving any name. She went to the sofa, laid down her umbrella and a paper parcel upon it, then turned to me and said, “I’m gaun to bide a’ nicht; thae’s my nicht claes in the bundle, so ye’ll ken no to lay ony oot.”

“Bless me, Betsy!” said Mr Morgan. “Miss Noble, this is my sister Betsy.”

“A weel a wat is’t!” said she, “an’ I canna say but I’m a thocht wearied; oor no sae young as ou hae been, Dauvit.”

I rang to order up dinner. “Noo, dinna bring ony denners for me; jist gie me my tea. I wadna gie my tea when I’m forefoughten for a’ the denners ye could mak; no but that I could eat a bit cauld meat too if ye hae’t.”

So we had tea immediately, and cold roast beef, which I was glad to see Miss Betsy enjoy.

"And what wind's blown you here, Betsy?" asked Mr Morgan.

"Ye may weel speer that, Dauvit—it taks something by ordinar' to bring me to L——. I jist cam to see what aboot Lizzie; ye ken news o' that kind aye flees fast; an' I wanted to be at the bottom o't—she was aye a favourite o' mine; I dinna think but she was the only ane in the hoose that didna think shame o' her auld auntie."

"Nonsense!" said Mr Morgan, "but when you take a thing into your head, Betsy, it's not everybody that'll put it out."

"There's a pair o' us, Dauvit—but what has the lassie dune? run awa wi' a young jo—she nicht hae dune waur."

"If she has your approval, Betsy," said Mr Morgan, stung into satire, "then she can't be far wrong; but I think she has broken the fifth commandment, if you know what that is."

"I nicht ken, ony way; I think it's fifty years sin' I could say the carritch frae end to end—an' it's the commandment wi' promise—the commandment wi' promise—weel ye'll hae to gie her ye're blessing, an' let her get the gude o't."

"Miss Morgan,"—I began—

"Na—dinna Miss Morgan me—Betsy'll wash an' wear as lang as I'll need it."

"Well, Miss Betsy," I resumed, "this has been a very sore trial, indeed, to Mr Morgan——."

"I'se warrant has't; but if she's gotten a dacent young tradesman, an' they hae plenty o' love atween them, what for should na she preen

up her goon-tails an' work for her an' him, as her godly forbears hae dune afore her? She's young an' stoot, an' she's no a gowk; she'll lairn to guide his wage, an' mak' the best o' things. She's dune a daftlike thing, nae doot, an' its no a'thegither her faut, she wasna tell't better — but od I wad rather see her do the like o' that, than sic a wise like thing as marrying an auld man for siller, an' yet if she had, Dauvit, I doot na ye wad hae gien ye're consent, an' a braw waddin to the bargain. I kenned a bonnie young lassie that married a rich auld carle, an' at the very waddin denner he had to get a towel preened roond his neck, an' the best-maid fed him wi' a spune—he lived a year and a half, an' noo she's a highly respectable weedy," (she came over this with a keen ironical relish,) "a highly respectable weedy, an' aye pits a note in the plate on Sabbath days. Na, na, Lizzie, puir bairn, has dune a foolish thing, but I ca' that ither a sin, an' a sin to scunner at." With which emphatic declaration she stopped to take breath.

"An' what's he till his business—this lad?" she resumed.

"He stands on the step of an omnibus, lets people out and in, and collects the coppers," said Mr Morgan, slowly and distinctly.

"Weel, that's something dacent—he can be trusted wi' the bawbees it seems, an' that's mair than ane could say o' a' her relations." Mr Morgan groaned faintly.

"Weel, Dauvit," she went on, "ye'll be gaun

to gie him a lift, are ye no? if he's a dacent man ye'll surely do that—get him an omnibus o' his ain, maybe, if he kens ought aboot horses, but it's a kittle business dealin' wi' horses; hooever, he micht get on."

"No, Betsy," he said, "although they little deserve it, I'll do better wi' them than that—I'll put them into a fine new shop I am about to open."

"Fine! I'll warrant it's fine—as fine as pent an' varnish 'll mak' it—in the corner o' a new land, and bleezin' wi' licht, to draw a' the silly moths intil't, frae far and near—losh, Dauvit Morgan, will naething be a lesson to ye?—pit him in a speerit shop—pit him on the broad road an' cheer him on."

I felt for Mr Morgan. Although one may be capable of saying a stinging thing one's-self, when heated, it is a different thing to sit by and hear a third person do it, especially when the victim is in trying circumstances. What particulars of family history Miss Betsy referred to I did not know, but I pitied Mr Morgan, and I said, "Miss Betsy, if you would only consider——."

"Consider!" she broke in, "my certie, it's time to pook a man's coat-tails when his hoose is burnin! nae doot guid folks bairns hae gaen astray, like the sons o' that puir, auld, fat body, Eli, an' sair sair, on him it was whan he was telt it was a' his ain wite, but ou' dinna read that he pat them intil speerit-shops, he didna gang sae actively aboot their ruination as that."

Dauvit Morgan, I wad let my sons nap stanes on the roadside—I wad let them gang round the kintrie wi' a meal pock afore I set them to mak' siller in a speerit-shop!"

"Well, Betsy," said Mr Morgan, "I see you're aye the old woman; I'll leave you and Miss Noble to take out your crack together. Miss Noble," he said to me, "you'll have the pleasure of being met fully more than half way to-night."

"An' sae," said Miss Betsy, when her brother left the room, "you're here in Miss O'Shee's place—she was a weel-meanin' body, I daursa', but jist wonderfu' sma', jist wonderfu' sma'; I dinna think she ever pat her fit in onybody's shoon but her ain a' the days o' her life. An' sae it's your sister that's married to Johnnie; weel, he was aye a fine, kindly laddie, wi' a wonderfu' hankering after the genteel, *that* keepit him oot the speerit-shop, sirs, let us be thankfu'. Is your sister onything like you, Miss Noble?"

"In appearance?—No, nor in anything else, I fancy."

"Jist a kind o' family likeness maybe; ye wadna say Dauvit an' me were very like, and yet onybody nicht tell that ou're pears aff the same tree—weel I'll hae to gang to New Broom an' see the young folk, some day, I'se warrant."

I said, what I was sure was true—that Mary would be delighted to see her.

"Weel, that's as maybe—I hardly expect folk to be delighted wi' me, but I can thole something short o' that. Woman, its waesome to

think o' that bairn, Lizzie; but I maun awa to my bed an' try an' get a sleep, for I'm gey sair dune for want o't, for I hae sleepit nane sin' I heard tell o' this, and forbye that, the thoct o' thae young folk beginning the warld in a speerit-shop is eneuch to mak sleepier folk than me waukrife."

She went away early next day, "for she had to be hame that nicht, an' was gaun to see Lizzie afore she left the toon."

I was really sorry that she left so soon, and sent a message by her to Lizzie. Whether she brought her opinions to bear in full force upon Lizzie and her husband, I do not know; if she did, they hadn't much effect, for George Myles, in a short time, was in possession of the handsome new shop. Mr Morgan took a good house and furnished it for them, and as both shop and house were in our own suburb, we saw Lizzie every day.

As generally happens when you have speculated a good deal about any person whom you are about to meet, I found George Myles to be a totally different type of individual from any I had pictured. Indeed, the more I knew of him, the more I wondered at his allowing himself to marry in the way he did, although Lizzie was a good excuse. He was a reserved, sensible, modest man; who, as far as education, speech, and manner went, was a long way a-head of his father-in-law. There was no affectation about him of one kind or other. He had closed with Mr Morgan's offers of promotion at once. I

daresay he was glad to do anything that would put his wife in circumstances befitting her previous habits; whether he had any qualms as to the nature of his business, I didn't know—he made it pay well. His wife's family were soon reconciled to the connection, as such reconciliations go, when nothing better can be made of it, and I think Lizzie and he were a very happy couple, not that she at once shed all her wilfulness and folly, for she didn't; but, there was a bit in her mouth which he managed with great gentleness and dexterity

Dr England I did not see for a considerable time after this remarkable marriage, and when I did see him he was perfectly unchanged, only he never mentioned Mrs Myles' name; and, if at any time he was asked to meet the Myleses, it invariably happened that he was engaged. I was "romantic" enough, as Mr Morgan would have said, to think that he couldn't just yet trust himself to such an ordeal, or was it that he thought it necessary to mark very distinctly his disapproval of Lizzie's undutiful conduct—most likely the latter. He still made a pet of Fanny, but Lizzie had passed from his life and his thoughts; or, did he frame these years of his life, in which her picture occupied the foreground, and hang it up in his memory? I don't know. Lizzie often spoke of him, and wondered how it was that she never happened to meet him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It is surprising how soon after a season of excitement, even although of a painful kind, people subside into their ordinary habits; having shot the rapids, they begin to move quietly on. So it was with us at Honeycomb House for a time, till Mrs Morgan again transgressed all bounds. Notwithstanding every precaution, she continued, time after time, to go to such excess, that Mr Morgan was driven to the conclusion that it would be better to send her from home. I was glad to hear him say so. It was a great sacrifice for me to stay in charge of her, and nothing except my regard for Fanny would have induced me to do it. At last, Mr Morgan put an advertisement once more in the newspapers to the effect that board was wanted for a lady of intemperate habits, either in the family of a clergyman or medical man, where a gentle restraint would be exercised. Terms, £100 per annum.

I think the reader would hardly believe the number of clergymen and medical men for whom a hundred a-year had great charms, even accompanied by the presence of a drunken woman. I thought if they had known her as well as I did, they would rather have eaten their dinner of herbs in peace than have sought to enlarge their income at such an expense of comfort. Anyhow, gentlemen of the required professions, all over the country, from Land's End to John-

o'-Groats applied. Fine houses, in the most salubrious situations; families quiet and retired; families lively and intelligent; families where there were no children; families, the heads of which thought the wiles of infancy a positive means of cure in such cases; musical and literary households; doctors who had made dipsomania their special study; clergymen who were amateur hydropathists, and who had turned out various such cases entirely cured by means of that treatment; and others, too numerous to mention, bade for the pleasure of Mrs Morgan's society. I was sorry to think that so many, of probably the worthiest and most hard-working members of the community, should be in such straitened circumstances.

Mr Morgan sifted the correspondence. It had been a bitter struggle with him before he came to the resolution to send his wife out of his house—the mother of his children—she about whom hung all the memories of his youth—not but it would be preposterous to say that Mr Morgan was at all sentimental; still, there are few men who have not somewhere in their nature, chords that will vibrate when a *sough* of “auld langsyne” sweeps over them, especially when it blows out of a cloud of calamity.

After a good deal of careful inquiry he fixed on the place of her residence. I had nothing to do in preparing her for her exile. How her husband brought her to the point I don't know, but she went off with tolerable grace; indeed, she was past feeling ashamed. I was not sorry

to see my occupation go. I daresay the reader thinks I am severe on this lady, that I have nothing good to say of her, that I forget that drunkenness is a disease, the victims of which are to be pitied perhaps as much as blamed. I have heard that said, and likely enough I did not make sufficient allowance for Mrs Morgan; but this was the way her case presented itself to me. Here was a woman with every possible motive to abstain, who, on system, planned to make herself drunk, regardless of the misery she inflicted on every one whose happiness ought to have been her end in life. You may make her out to be an object of pity and sympathy if you like; I only think, if you had been "trysted" with her as I was, actual contact might have changed your opinion. But I pitied her for all that.

Wanting the three inmates that in their respective lines made the most stir, Honeycomb House became a very quiet, methodical dwelling. Had it not been that we had several tender and vital feelers out in the world which might at any moment get a sudden, violent jerk, Fanny and I would have enjoyed ourselves too well; but there's never much risk of that. So several years slipped away, during which our chief excitement was Mrs Morgan's changes of abode, which were very frequent. The history of them was this. For several months, she and the musical, intellectual, lively, or hydropathic family, as the case might be, were mutually delighted with each other; then came an out-

burst of her peculiar disease; letters and telegrams to Mr Morgan; he hurries off, sees her through it, and gets things smoothed up; another interval, and another violent relapse on the part of Mrs Morgan; letters politely requesting that Mr Morgan will have the goodness to get her removed at his earliest convenience, as it is impossible, &c. I think no one that has not gone through all this can conceive the kind of torture it is, and yet Mr Morgan was making a great deal of money yearly, by swelling the amount of exactly the same kind of wretchedness, and never once flinched in his opinion as to the rightness of his business. Truly his eyes were holden that he could not see.

But light began to break in other quarters. One day, when Mrs Myles was with us, she began to speak of Sarah Wilson, our old servant, who was married, as I have stated, from Honeycomb House. "Do you know," she said, "I much fear that Sarah and her husband are going all wrong together. They live not very far from us, and I have seen her several times deplorably the worse of drink."

"That is most melancholy," I said. "It is a long time now, since I have called upon her; but I thought there was something not as it should be. She was not like her old, smart, tidy self."

"She is very unlike that, now, if you saw her. I pointed her out to George on the street one day, and he said, 'Why, that's a woman that comes to our shop, regularly and very often, for

drink.' I said I was very sorry to hear that. 'What makes you sorry?' he asked; 'the oftener she comes the better for us, you know.' 'But,' said I, 'it will be the ruin of her, and it is hateful to rise on the ruin of creatures like her.' Then he said, 'I'm glad, Lizzie, you have got to that point without my help. I got to it long ago. I went into that business without much thought, as I would have gone into any business at the time by which I could make money. At first, my dislike to it was a matter of feeling. Every poor wretch that drank a gill over the counter, and gave me his last coppers, made me feel miserable, pitying him, and the women are worse still. I never go into my house and see you and the bairns, but I think of some dirty, drunken woman with an infant in her arms. But now it's conscience as much as feeling with me, and if I could see any way of providing for you and the bairns, I would not be a day in that business.' He said all that, Rachel, and the more I think of it, the more I think he is right. I daresay my father would be very angry if he heard us, and at one time, and till comparatively lately, it never occurred to me to think that selling whisky was not as good as selling tea. Till you came to our house, it was a subject never mentioned in one way or other, except by aunt Betsy, and we all thought her highly eccentric; in fact, her opinions were a kind of standing joke with us—then you recollect, at least I do, how quietly and effectually you snubbed me the first night you came, when

I said it was vulgar to take toddy; you said you didn't dislike vulgarity, and you liked a glass of toddy. You hadn't your present opinions then, Rachel."

"No, I had never thought of the subject then; but, Lizzie, two things have often puzzled me about your husband. The one is how he ever married you in the way he did; and the other, how he so readily went into a whisky-shop. He is very unlike the man to do either of these things."

"You see I'm at the bottom of all the mischief. I can't put right his first blunder, but I'll do all I can to help him about the second. Although what he can do else I don't know. I don't mean that he is not capable of doing many things; but how he is to get on; it is a serious thing, Rachel, for a man with a family to give up a good business—I mean a lucrative business."

"You've grown wondrous wise, Mrs Lizzie—just have the same strong faith you had when you married."

"The same strong folly you mean, Rachel. I am heartily ashamed of that act of my life, although I have rejoiced in it almost every minute since, and I am ready to suffer hardship, if that should be our lot, for conscience sake. At any rate, I can curtail all our expenses. I have experience enough for that, now, but I dread irritating my father—poor man, he has had so much to try him."

"I do not doubt that he will be very angry, but that can't be helped. I am sorry for him,

but I am heartily glad that you and George take this view of the matter. It will rejoice Fanny, too, and I see no reason why he should not succeed in some business, in which to succeed would be both comfort and satisfaction."

"I hope so—George is very cautious and sagacious, he will take his measures well."

"True—the first thing I ever heard of him impressed me with a very high opinion of his caution and sagacity."

"Now Rachel," she said, laughing and blushing "positively I sometimes shudder when I think that, for anything I knew, he might as likely have been a blackguard, or a ninny, as what he is, and his rashness was about equal to mine. We can see all that, now, and yet it has been the happiest piece of folly possible."

CHAPTER XIX.

FANNY and I were in the habit of going frequently to New Broom. We never staid long at a time, as we preferred going together, and it did not suit very well for us both to be away for a lengthened period; had we gone separately, we might have made longer visits. It was a long while before I noticed, but at last I did notice, that some kind of change had come over John and Mary; they had grown very grave and solemn, and even melancholy, I

thought. I laughingly remarked this to them, and they both said, "Indeed, they were not aware."

"Well," I said, still laughing, "you often look as if you had committed a murder, had hid the body in the garden, and expected any chance person to make the discovery."

"That's tremendous," said John; "really Rachel, to be the practical person you pass yourself off for, you have a very lively, or rather deadly imagination."

"Well," I said, "look at Mary now, and tell me if I only *imagine* that she looks solemn and preoccupied?"

"So I am," said Mary, "both solemn and preoccupied, I was just thinking how I could make a leg of lamb keep fresh for some days longer in this weather."

"Certainly," I said, "that's enough to make any one look solemn, but you should not infect the children—they are growing quite soft and sentimental; you'd better let them go with us to L——, and we'll get over the little Myleses; their sentimental vein is not unduly cultivated, I assure you, and they will brace them up, otherwise you'll be having them too good for this world, as people say."

And really there was often a rush of tenderness in Mary's voice and manner towards her children, the pathos of which struck me; it always seemed as if she were deprecating some calamity that might be hanging over them.

On this occasion, we staid over the Sunday.

John was to preach. When Mary came down to breakfast on Sunday morning, she told us that her husband had been very unwell, that she had done all she could to persuade him not to preach, but he was determined to do it, as no substitute could at that hour be had.

"But, Mary," I said, "it is no duty to preach if he is so unable—I'll go up and see how he is, and try to advise him."

"Don't go," she said, in a tone almost of entreaty, "it will make no difference, and he won't care for being interrupted at present, when he is preparing."

Of course I did not insist on visiting him, so that I did not see him till he was going up the pulpit stairs. I understood that violent headache was what he chiefly complained of; he frequently put his hand to his forehead, during the service, while his eyes—as I have seen in persons suffering from bilious headache—looked brighter than usual, and his face was slightly flushed. I was sorry that he should have thought it necessary to preach, and Mary looked positively agitated about him. She watched him most intently, and I saw her fingers working nervously in her closed hand. He got on tolerably well, except that he seemed to forget sometimes what he was saying, and had to go back a few sentences, and he had a little difficulty in enunciating distinctly; he was near the end of his discourse, and was not speaking of anything—judging from my own feelings—to cause it, when he suddenly appeared

quite overcome, sat down, and burst into tears. No one moved, not even Mary ; there was a dead hush. In a few minutes he rose again, said that he had not felt well, that he would not have been in the pulpit, if he could have secured the services of a brother minister, and that he would make no apology for taking his manuscript and reading to the end. He did so, and closed the services. Mary hurried from the pew and went with him to the house.

As Fanny and I, in coming out of church, were passing the foot of the stair that led to the gallery above, I saw a man looking intently at us—he was near the head of the stair—a middle-aged, disreputable-looking man ; I was certain I had seen him before—that he was the person who had escaped drowning at Leerielaw. He was looking at us, as if he was not wholly ignorant as to who we were. I thought—“Can this man have stumbled into that church by accident, or has he some such hold on John Morgan as he has on his sister, and was it his presence that agitated him to such a degree?” I almost hoped it, for a very painful impression would occur to me—I could not avoid the idea that the forgetfulness, the indistinct utterance, the unaccountable loss of self-control, were symptoms of incipient brain disease.

I almost forgot the man whose appearance had again roused my curiosity, and hurried to the house. I met one of the servants in the lobby, and found that John and Mary had gone to their own room. I said to the servant, “Jane,

has your master had any attack like this before?"

"Yes, Ma'am," she said; "once or twice, since I came, but never on a Sabbath day afore."

The girl, I knew, had only been six months in the house; my fears were confirmed—if John and Mary took this view of the case, no wonder than they looked grave sometimes—but why had they not spoken of it, why, above all, had they not had medical advice?

Mary came down to dinner, looking pale, but quite cheerful comparatively; she said, "John was much better, but meant to keep his own room for the rest of the day; she had no doubt that to-morrow he would be quite well." Fanny grew cheerful too on this intelligence.

"But, Mary," I said, "I find this is not the first attack of the kind he has had?"

"How do you know?" she said.

"Oh, Jane told me; I asked her, and I think you have been wrong in not speaking of it, and getting a doctor's advice at once."

"You might have done better than ask Jane questions of the sort; servants always exaggerate any thing of the kind,—violent headache and occasional mental depression only take a day or two to wear off."

I did not say more, for I did not wish to alarm her, it might be, unnecessarily, but I resolved to talk the matter over with John.

Next morning, I saw him from my window at work in the garden, transplanting stock gilly-flowers. He had the finest flowers of all

kinds; it was worth the journey from L——, to see the succession of flower-beds; indeed he made pets of his vegetables too, having cabbages of some peculiarly delicate kind, ready to cut before the cabbages of other people had made up their minds to grow. So I hied me into the garden fragrant with the rich breath of the summer morning, and congratulated him upon being able to be at work. He said, "Two hours' work in the garden he always found to be better than any medicine."

"For all that," I said, "you should not allow a turn of illness like yesterday's to pass unnoticed—you should have medical advice—prevention is ten times better and easier than cure."

"There can't be two opinions about that," he said, and he went on busily digging a hole with his trowel.

"Well," I said, "if you are afraid of alarming Mary—although I don't think concealment of any kind good—you might consult a doctor quietly; probably relaxation, change, a few weeks on the Continent just at present, might do you a world of good, and would not be very bitter medicine."

"Not at all; only I don't require it, and prefer being at home—if my disease is curable it will cure at home as well as elsewhere—I can be my own doctor," and he dibbled a gilly-flower into its hole.

I said, "John, don't trifle; I shall be very unhappy, if I think you are neglecting the means of health."

"I should be very sorry to make you unhappy, Rachel, but really, I have no need of advice from doctors—I am in perfect health."

"You did not look very like it yesterday—by the bye," I said, "did you notice a man, a stranger, in the gallery, a man I have seen somewhere before? I saw him coming down the stairs—I wondered if you knew him, or what brought him there."

"I didn't notice any one in particular, but at this season there are often strangers present."

We gathered some flowers for the breakfast-table, and went in. It was a wonderfully pleasant retreat on a summer day, the manse of New Broom. The dining-room, in which we breakfasted, had a large bow-window looking into the garden, which on this summer morning was dressed in its best; the window was open, and the blackbird and the mavis gave us music for our meal. Presently the children ran in with radiant faces and well brushed curls, to say good morning and give a kiss all round. In a little they subsided on stools to enjoy the tops of the eggs, which they claimed as their perquisites. They were very fine children, a boy and a girl, and having a sense of property in them made them all the dearer to me, although I don't think I was less fond of Lizzie's two little girls.

Fanny and I had to return to L——, that day, and we had to leave early in the forenoon, for which we were very sorry. I earnestly requested both John and Mary, if he had such

another attack of illness to have a doctor, and I comforted myself by considering that I could speak of the matter to Dr England. We had just said good-bye and driven away, when I saw the man, the stranger of yesterday, come round the garden wall towards the manse. I touched Fanny's arm, "Do you know that man," I said, "who has just come in view?"

"How should I? I know very few people here."

"He does not belong to New Broom, he is sometimes in L——."

I would have given something to know whether he was going to call at the manse, but before he got the length of the gate we were whisked round a corner and out of sight.

As we travelled, Fanny said, "I am always very sorry to leave New Broom; I don't know a more delightful place, there seems so little about it to hurt or destroy. Do you know, Miss Noble, I haven't been able to prevent myself thinking of our poor old servant, Sarah Wilson. I much doubt she learned to drink in our house; I know she made a practice of drinking all that was left in the glasses."

"I know she did; I once spoke to her about it."

"I never had courage to do that; besides what good was speaking to do? She was not going to be convinced that it was a bad thing for her when almost every body in the house took it, and we lived by the sale of it."

"That's quite true," I said; "but let us hope that things are not so bad with Sarah yet."

We'll go and call upon her soon, and try what we can do to get her and her husband to become abstainers."

"I wonder every one is not that; but I needn't wonder when I see my own father. Do you know the horrors connected with drinking have been like a millstone about my neck ever since I could think? Ministers going about among their people must see the terrible evils of it; one would think they would rise as one man to put it down, but they don't. Mary says there's not a total abstainer in their presbytery, they all drink, and some of them not a little; she says she would most gladly abstain, and keep house on the same principle, but she does not think, in the circumstances, it would do."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, "that is something new—Mary come to that point. I had no idea of it; I have given up speaking about it to them; and is John of the same opinion?"

"Well, she didn't say so, and I didn't speak to him of it. It is very pleasant isn't it to see how much he is loved by his people, so many of them inquiring for him both last night and to-day; there has been quite a ferment about him. I saw one of his elders this morning while you were in the garden; such a fine old man, but stern-looking too. I could have fancied him at Bothwell Bridge with a scythe in his hand—he was quite moved about the minister's illness."

"I hope all cause of anxiety will pass away, but it is very gratifying to see it."

We were not long at home again when our

doctor called, and I seized an opportunity of telling him of John's illness, and detailing, so far as I knew them, its symptoms, and hinting at what I conceived they pointed.

"Well, but didn't he say he was in perfect health?"

"Yes, he did."

"Then, why be uneasy—why not believe it?"

"He may feel so, and yet be in danger."

"So, we are all in danger. I don't think he has any disease but what he may doctor himself, as he says, but I'll go and see him; I'll make arrangements, and spend a week with him; I may be able to give him a good advice."

"You are very, very kind."

"Kind to myself—where could I go for a week's play that I could be better? and he is an old friend of mine; I have known him since he was a boy."

"You relieve my mind entirely; I hope you will advise him to take care."

"I shall," he said emphatically. "That's all the advice he needs, and if he acts on it he is safe—brain disease, indeed! You must lose that trick of interpreting symptoms, Miss Noble; ladies are encroaching on our profession, I believe, but I don't approve of it altogether."

"Do you know, doctor, I think John is turning a teetotaler?"

"Eh, what! he is not making a parade of teetotalism is he? I should consider that a very bad symptom indeed," and he actually looked grave.

"There, doctor—there's prejudice for you; if a man's a total abstainer why shouldn't he let it be known. I suppose you call that making a parade?"

"Does he let it be known that he is a teetotaler?" asked the doctor.

"No—I didn't hear him speak of it, but Fanny tells me that Mary wishes to become a total abstainer, and keep house on the principle—"

"Ah!" interrupted the doctor, "that's it—is it? that's a different thing."

"But she never would have harboured such a bold notion unless John had prompted it."

"You admire that style of matrimony, Miss Noble—you think that's all as it should be?"

"I admire Mary—I am apt to admire a degree of virtue that's out of my own reach."

The doctor laughed and went away. When he returned from New Broom he reported John in perfect health, but said that as he promised he had positively dosed him with good advice. "I perfectly understand the nature of his attacks, and told him how to avoid them for the future. He has it in his own hands; care is all that is needed." I was very grateful to have my anxiety removed.

CHAPTER XX.

ACCORDING to intention, Fanny and I turned out one evening, to call on our old servant, Sarah.

We chose the evening for our visit, as we wished to see her husband as well as herself. Their house was in a quiet, little by-street, one of the undermost flats of a big "land" of houses; the windows looked into the street, and came pretty close down to the ground.

Groups of children were playing about. When we came to Sarah's windows, a crowd of them were gathered round, and two or three boys taller than the rest were flattening their noses against the glass, looking in over the short blinds, the colour of which showed that they had not been changed for a very long time.

"They're fechtin' again, and she's cryin' murder," said one of the biggest boys, as we approached. "Here's a go—he's lickin' her; it's time the police was here."

I said to Fanny, "The Wilsons must have moved, perhaps some of these boys can tell us where they live now," so I picked out the biggest boy and asked him if he knew where the Wilsons lived? "In there," he said; "it's them that's fechtin'."

Fanny and I looked at each other in dismay; we went into the entry off which the doors of the houses opened, and stood a minute, considering whether we hadn't better go home again; a boy put his head into the entry and cried "Wife, ye had better no gang in there, or ye'll catch't."

Fanny looked again at me, and said, "What shall we do?"

I said, "Suppose we knock at the door at any rate, that may stop the quarrel, if it has

not stopped already—I hear no noise?” So I gave a sharp loud knock. In a minute, the door was opened by a little child, whose size said she should be an infant, but whose face told that care sat on her little shoulders, and clung round her neck, as the old man of the mountain bestrode Sinbad.

“Well, Sarah,” I said, “is your mother in?”

“Yes, mem,” she said, with a kind of scared look in her eyes, “but she’s lyin’ on the grund, and she’ll no rise.” We heard a groan; this determined us—we went in, and there, sure enough, was Sarah, lying on the middle of the floor, her clothes dirty and bedabbled, her hair unfastened, her face red and distorted, and her chest heaving frightfully; and there, crouched in a corner, gazing at her with a terrified stare, was her husband. An infant was in the cradle, lying just as it had been dropped from senseless hands, but sleeping peacefully nevertheless. An excited cat turned its wild, green eyes upon us for an instant, having stopped for the purpose, with one foot suspended in mid-flight; then darted out of sight. The house was dirty; the fire was out. The little girl bent close to her mother’s ear and cried, “Mother, mother, O, mother, speak!” but got no answer. I knelt down and cut the fastenings of the unhappy woman’s dress, if possible, to ease her breathing; I said, “If we could get her lifted into the bed.” Fanny and I were about to try if we could do it, when the door opened and two policemen entered. They looked round, and with practised eyes took the measure

of the scene. They lifted Sarah into the bed, and took her husband into their keeping; he made no resistance, being apparently quite stunned. They went away, saying, they would send a doctor to examine the woman. The little girl sat on a stool and cried quietly to herself, without daring to utter a sound. Some of the neighbours came in, and two decent-looking women volunteered to stay and look after Sarah. We remained till the doctor came and gave his report, which was nearly as bad as could be—he hardly thought she could recover. Then we left, taking the little girl with us for the present; knots of people were standing about the street and looking at the house; we were eagerly scanned as we passed, and saw serious faces, and heard whispers. “He had killed her,” they said; “it could be proved that he had kicked her again and again; laddies saw him in at the window; he would likely swing for it yet.” We were glad to hurry out of hearing. As we went home we called on Mrs Myles, and she sent and took the infant—she had a right to do something, she said.

When Thomas Wilson came to himself—what a world of meaning is compressed into these three simple words, anguish, remorse, memories, which hardly time itself shall blot out—he found that he was in prison for assaulting his wife, and that if the feeble life which flickered in her bruised and battered body went out, he would have to stand his trial for murder, with the full consciousness that he was guilty.

Shame, terror, and a delirious anxiety to live took possession of Sarah when *she* came to herself—and she did live; very slowly she recovered, but she did recover. Her husband was tried for the minor offence, and all extenuating circumstances being dwelt upon, and many witnesses coming forward to testify to his general good conduct, he escaped with the very lenient punishment of six months' imprisonment. Shortly after, another man was tried in very similar circumstances, only, in this case the unfortunate woman was killed; he was condemned to die, and although every effort was made to get the sentence remitted, it was carried into effect, and that on the very morning of the day Thomas and Sarah met once more on their own hearth-stone. I think if they ever felt that they had been suspended over an abyss by a single strand of cord, it was then. How they met, or what they said, I do not know, but that was the turning-point of their lives; they agreed never more to touch intoxicating drink, and they kept the resolution, and have lived down the memory of that terrible time, in most minds but their own.

This affair also brought things to a crisis with George Myles—he must give up his present business, he said, even if he should take his old place at the back of the omnibus. And he did give it up. He came to Honeycomb House. I did not thank him for involving me in such a disagreeable scene, and he acknowledged that it was not fair, but he wished to have what shelter

my presence could give him—gave up to Mr Morgan the shop, the stock, and the business, explaining as mildly as he could his reasons for doing so.

It was some time before Mr Morgan took in his meaning; then he said, in a quiet, cool way, like the soft notes that prelude the tempest, "Conscience—did you say conscience?"

"Yes."

"First fine feeling, and then delicate scruples. That's what I am to understand, is it? You see I like to make sure work."

"Yes, sir. I was vexed to see people drunk, and then I didn't like to make a profit of it."

"But I'm not vexed to see people drunk—I enjoy it. You're sure of that now, aren't you?"

"Mr Morgan——"

"People come to my shop, buy an article, and I am responsible for the use or abuse they make of it—that's it, isn't it?"

"Mr Morgan, I only speak for myself."

"Only for yourself? Well, that's gratifying, modest—extremely modest. Would you not be persuaded to speak for me too? And," in a rising voice, "it is *you*, sir, you that have the assurance to come and tell me this? that the business in which my son and I are engaged is not fit for *you*—is not a fair, just, and honourable one, such as *you* can continue in—*you* that I lifted out of the gutter, where I had better have left you, and to which you likely mean to go back. Conscience! Where was your conscience when you stole my daughter—when you

got her to leave my house ; but honesty and gratitude, I suppose you don't know what these are, sir ?”

“I don't defend myself,” said George, quietly.

“You don't need. A man of *your* standing defend yourself before an old reprobate like me. Leave this house! Tell Lizzie I'll take her and her children back. For you, you may go and keep your conscience as clean as you're teeth are likely to be. Leave the house, I say,” and he positively quivered with passion.

“I will go, but I may say that Lizzie is of my mind in this matter,” and George left the room.

Mr Morgan sat down. I ventured to glance at him, and thought that the words of the not very majestic last of the Jameses would burst from the lips of the really somewhat majestic spirit-dealer, “God help me, my own children have forsaken me.” They were both parents, and both obstinate, but I think if they had changed places, Mr Morgan would unquestionably have cut the more respectable figure on the page of history. If I had had James for the spirit-dealer and my employer, I don't know how I would have managed at all. Also, Mr Morgan was luckier in his son-in-law than James, and “is it possible” that I am luckier in having George Myles to write about rather than George of Denmark, although the former had to provide for his family, and projected opening a small shop in the provision line?

CHAPTER XXI.

MR MORGAN did not go the length of prohibiting intercourse between the families, but if he had, I would not have considered myself bound by the decree. I went frequently to spend an evening with Lizzie and George, and it was on one of these occasions that I heard "provisions" mooted as the future field of enterprise.

"You see, Miss Noble," said George, "I mean to try to get a small shop in this district where I am known; when I went with the omnibus I was popular. Hadn't I a manner that pleased the ladies, Lizzie?"

"I never heard of it," replied Lizzie, gravely.

"May be, but it's true though," said George; "and lots of them will come to the provision shop—but where to get the provisions is the puzzle to begin with?"

"Oh," said Lizzie, "begin with very little and go on gradually, your expenses will be trifling; the shop-rent won't be heavy, and you needn't keep a shopman. I'll help you to keep the shop."

"Well done!" said he, "I think I see you slicing bacon and spading out butter—you would be a dear shopman—I mean an expensive one. While you are in the shop things are going to sixes and sevens here—the bairns with no one to look after them growing up to run away with any low fellow that might take

advantage of them—we'll have none of that, Mrs Myles."

"That we shall not," said Lizzie, "they'll be better looked after, they'll not get wandering at their own sweet will as their precious mamma did."

"I used to feel like a fool, Lizzie, when you used to trip down the omnibus steps in your dainty little boots, and alight on the ground like a feather. Then when you dropped the money into my great weather-beaten paw, out of a hand on which the pretty glove seemed to have grown, it fitted so exactly, I felt, I felt ——"

"Probably like an earthworm looking up at a bird of Paradise," she said; "but you would know that birds of Paradise sometimes stooped to gobble up earthworms?"

"I knew that earthworms never presumed to look at birds of Paradise, unless birds of Paradise first ——"

"George!"

"Well, it's true, but I'll never tell. I once read an autobiography of what's called a self-made man—what I'm going to be you know—and in it he describes fully how his wife courted him. I could have sent my fist into the fellow's face. When I have made a plum I'll likely write my biography, but I'll not tell, Lizzie, you may depend on me."

"Miss Noble," said she, "pay no attention to the nonsense he speaks, he might have something more serious to think about;" then in a few minutes she said, "I wonder if any body

will ever tell the children—I wouldn't like them to know?"

She said this with such simple earnestness that George and I could not help laughing. There is a charm about the simple sayings of acute, clever people that is not about the common run of simple remarks.

"I don't know how we'll manage about that," said George, "they'll come to know, as sure as eggs are eggs—see how my thoughts run on the provision business—you must be their sister, Lizzie, as well as their mother, make them all your own, and then they'll tell you what they think of the man in the place that papa once was, when he was very poor, before he was a great wholesale merchant, and kept his carriage."

"There now, George, take care and don't kick your basket of eggs; just look well to the shop, and as long as we can walk we won't need a carriage. I don't mean to take a ride even in the omnibus now; we must be thrifty, and you must be serious and think."

Certainly he must, about how to begin business for instance, without capital, for, as I conjectured, he had nothing but what he might have saved during the past few years, little enough likely, for, as might be supposed, Lizzie's ideas of economy were not over stringent.

If, reader, you are on the out-look for objects to pity, don't select young people in necessitous circumstances; Lizzie and George seemed only pleasantly exhilarated; it was simply holiday excitement with them; he had faith, she had no

fear, and they were much nearer their end than if, to use a popular expression, they had fretted themselves to fiddle-strings. Probably Mr Morgan pictured them to himself sitting in blank despair, repenting their childish folly in dust and ashes, only waiting for ever so slight encouragement—which he resolved they should never have; they had sinned of their own accord, and of their own accord they must own it—to humble themselves at his feet, and ask to be re-instated. He could not imagine their happy, hearty enjoyment—so independent of external circumstances.

Lizzie, her husband, and myself were still sitting talking when the bell rang, and we heard the patter of little feet accompanying the servant who went to open the door. Then we heard a voice we had no difficulty in recognising, say, "Bairn, has ye're mother nae mair sense than to hae the like o' you oot o' ye're bed at this time o' nicht? Whan's she to get a steek put in, if it's no after the weans are in their bed? An' hoo are ye, bairnikie?" said the voice to the little girl. "Kite vell—how ou?" said Lizzie the less.

"That's aunt Betsy," said Mrs Myles; "what can have happened to bring her from home—nothing disagreeable, I hope?"

Miss Betsy Morgan entered with no evil tidings in her face certainly.

"An' hoo's a' wi' ye?" she says, "I'm blythe to see ye sae canty like."

"I hope you didn't expect to find us anything

else, auntie?" said Lizzie, as she settled the old lady in an easy chair, and took her bonnet and shawl.

"Weel, Lizzie lass, there's never ony kennin' hoo ye're to find folk in this warld."

"We haven't found the world such a bad one yet, Miss Betsy," said George.

"Aye, ye're young; ye'll maybe no say the same thing fifty year after this—no but that I've had a gey canny time o't mysel, being a single woman; but oh, let ye keep yersel to yersel as ye like, ye will get mixed up wi' folk, an' whiles get a sair heart or ever ye ken."

"Auntie, who's vexing you now—what's the matter?"

"I didna say ony body's vexin' me—may be somebody's pleesurin' me—what wad ye think?"

"I would be very glad indeed," said Lizzie.

"Weel it's e'en so—fulish folk, nae doot, wi' an awfu' want o' warldly wisdom, throwin' awa a gude gaun, weel payin' business, and landin' themsels on the parish—it's nae joke."

"It's a sober truth," said George, with possibly a squint at a pun.

"The soberer the better," said Miss Betsy; "ye wad wonder hoo the likes o' me aye hears tell o' a' thing; weel, I just cam off ance errand to see what ye're gaun to turn ye're hand to next?"

"George thinks of going into the provision business," said Lizzie, "and I was offering to be his shopman, but he won't have me."

"Weel, I wadna say but he's richt in no

ha'in' ye in the shop; ye wad aye be giein' far ower gude wecht, an' ye wad be by ordinar' lovish wi' the paper an' the string, an' thae things tell on a business; no to say that if a woman looks after her hoose an' her bairns, she has handlin' eneuch without keepin' a shop; but it's no a bad thocht the provisions—folk maun aye hae provisions, an' they're aye rinnin' dune; but ye wad need to take tent hoo ye gie credit—I'm no ower fond o' thae bits o' pass-books, there's ower mony o' them gaun aboot."

"I doubt," said George, "I'll have to ask credit before I give much."

"That's it noo—I jist thocht that," said Miss Betsy, "but it'll no do—it'll jist no do, ye maun gang to the market wi' the siller in ye're pouch—it's a wonderfu' advantage."

"Wonderful," said George. "I'll have to take to the omnibus again, and try if I can find a fat purse in the bottom of it, that nobody claims; that's my likeliest chance of such an advantage."

"It would be better than stealing pocket handkerchiefs," put in Lizzie. "Miss Noble felt shocked and alarmed at your dishonesty, George. I don't think she is over fond of you playing with her scissors yet. You had better put them down."

"Certainly," said George, and I really think he blushed.

"Noo, that's some story o' what ye'll ca' the auld times, I'll warrant," said Miss Betsy. "Ye wad break a crookit saxpence atween ye, na

doot. Aweel, mair fules hae dune that in their day than you, and no aye for luck either," and Miss Betsy strangled a sigh in the birth. Was there some romantic tale, with Miss Betsy for its heroine? Those keen, dark eyes had probably done execution in their day, and the handsome face, though withered now, and the figure that must have been graceful before years bent the shoulders and made it stiff, had in time past attracted their share of admiration.

"But," she went on, "we're away frae the bit—Leezie there kens I seldom speak withoot raison, an' what I was gaun to say is this—I'll gie ye the siller—an' I daursay I'm maybe an auld gowk for doin't, but I'll gie ye it; gin ye lose't—an' ye may—for prosperity's no the promise o' the New Testament—I'll fend, an' gin ye doobl't I'll get it back. I'll no say it was easy come by; few folk ken I hae sic a posy—the feck o't was left me by an' auld mistress, mony a year sin'—eh, she was a fashous body, an' muckle I put up wi', wi' nae expectation o' gettin' a bawbee mair than my wage. Naething ever pleased her; but she was a gude body for a' that. It's an auld sayin', that grace will bide where neither you nor me wad like to bide—an' I'se warrant she's gotten a' things to her mind noo. Weel, that'll gang its length in the stockin' o' ye're shop. Ye've come oot like Abraham, no kennin' where ye was gaun, and there's five hundred pound to ye," and she laid a cheque for that amount on the table. We

were all struck dumb for a minute; then Lizzie silently kissed her aunt, and George said, "I feel your kindness deeply, but I don't think I can take it—I can't take it."

"What for should na ye tak' it, if I've made up my mind to gie ye't? I canna say I've aye had an easy mind wi' sae muckle siller lyin' by an' sae mony folk ill aff—a body's no to live here aye, an we canna tak' it wi' us. I'm glad o' sic a gude use to put it to. I approve o' the provisions. My certie, whan ye come to dee, as ye will some day, for a' sae far awa' as it looks—ye'll find the meal pocks a hantle safter cod to lay ye're head on than the whisky casks." The argument was quaintly put but it was forcible—George took the money, and began business at once.

George Myles went home with me to Honeycomb House that evening, but beyond the gate he couldn't go, nor could I ask him to go. It is a very dreary thing the breaking up of close family intercourse from whatever cause. People come round to your door every little while professing to mend the finest china and crystal so that it shall be as strong as ever, and no flaw be visible—some good people try the same thing, and flatter themselves they have reached the same result in reuniting the shattered fragments of a broken friendship, but whatever they may say or think, neither article is perfect as at first; you must use them gingerly, take care—a drop of hot water, or cold—an inadvertent word, and lo, crack! They go to pieces

in your hands again. No, no, never break them, that's the best and only plan.

I don't think Fanny had missed me much, for although her papa and David had been out during the evening, Dr England and Charles Brown had been in; they had not left when I returned. As I looked at, and listened to Charles Brown, I thought that even the doctor might admit that his rawness was gone and replaced by a manufactured article of a high order.

Fanny and he were brisk on total abstinence topics; the doctor sat by and said nothing. I gave them Miss Betsy Morgan's comparative view of the provision and spirit trades in her own original terms.

"It's very true," said Fanny; "it may turn out that this change may be for George's worldly advantage, but I consider him a kind of martyr for the cause."

"Martyr!" I said; "look at Dr England—he is just forming his mouth to say 'bosh.'"

"I was forming my mouth to say, I am a teetotaler," said he with comic gravity.

"You!" I said. "Oh, doctor, don't say you are anything so absurd—because one man makes a beast of himself is that any reason why you and I should not take what will do us good?"

"No reason at all," he said; "but if I can prevent a man making a beast of himself by my abstinence, that's a reason why I should abstain."

"Your reason and your no reason shave close," said I; "female intellects are hardly equal to such nice hair-splitting—is your conversion recent?"

"Not very—why so?"

"Because I wonder we haven't heard of it before?"

"I'm not a very public character, but if you had been much interested, I daresay you might have made the discovery."

"We are much interested, and you ought to be a public character. If you and Mr Brown were to make the round of the country, and exhibit your gigantic selves as specimens of what can be done on water-drinking, I think it might do good."

"I don't know—big things are seldom good for much but to be looked at. We would need some noble little spirit to point us out and illustrate us—what do you say?"

"That we'll think over it."

CHAPTER XXII.

It was about this time that I had an illness. Hitherto I had not been accustomed to illness, and this was long and difficult to bear—not that it was very acute, but it sapped my strength utterly. For weeks I lay entirely passive; I believe my life was in danger oftener than once

during its course. If Mrs Myles and Fanny had been my sisters, they could not have done more for me than they did. I say Mrs Myles,—for though she sided altogether with her husband, she loved her father very dearly, and she had gone back and forward as usual, taking no notice of the changed position of affairs. Mr Morgan, for her sake, prevailed on himself to wink hard, and took no more notice of it than she did. I have no doubt he was very glad to have things on this footing with his daughter, although her husband was entirely beyond the pale of his forgiveness.

And, my own sister Mary—what of her? I hungered sometimes for her presence, but she never came, never offered to come; she wrote constantly and expressed great love and sympathy. I wondered she didn't come. It was strange. But in that illness everything was strange. I lay, to all appearance, in a dreamy unconscious state, yet my senses were doubly, trebly acute, especially my hearing. I heard every word spoken in the room, although in the very lowest tones. We chanced to have a servant who was very clumsy and awkward in her movements; when she entered for any purpose her presence was actual torture to me; her very breathing, the way she used her hands, her step across the room, the uproar she made about the fireside, were to me terrible. I remember wishing that our ears had been furnished with sound proof valves, or small ornamental stoppers to be used at will, as we shut our eyes. At last Fanny asked

Mary to come and stay a few weeks, and one day I heard Lizzie and her discussing Mary's answer in tones, I daresay, they thought it impossible I should hear.

"The dear woman," said Lizzie, "what does she mean? 'She can't possibly leave the children'—not leave them when John is at home, and the nurse with them they have had all their days? Why, what is she thinking of? but if she can't leave them she could bring them—if it wouldn't do to have them here they could be with me. Write and tell her so, Fanny; it is certainly extraordinary, and Rachel so very ill."

"It seems to me odd," said Fanny. "To be sure I never said anything to alarm her about Rachel, but one would think she would have come to see her at once."

"It is mysterious," said Lizzie.

When Mary's next note came, I heard them talking it over also. Lizzie was scanning it. "'She can't come with an easy mind unless you go and take her place'—what *is* she thinking about?—it's not *like* her to be so inconsiderate, she might know that you are necessary here, and wouldn't wish to leave Rachel."

"I'm most unwilling to leave her," said Fanny; "I can't leave her, and yet——"

Just then Dr England entered, and crossed the floor as softly as a cat; they explained the matter to him, and asked what he thought. "I think," he said, "you should go, Fanny; you would rather stay, I daresay, but you'll be the better for the change—it is not for you to be

so much in a sick room, and her sister must come—the visit may serve to rouse her a little ;” then half to himself, “her life is a very precious one.”

“Then I’ll stay here till Mary comes,” said Mrs Myles.

“Or till I get another nurse,” said the doctor.

“I don’t think she would like a stranger—perhaps you had better not ——”

“I have no intention of sending a stranger,” said he ; “trust me, Mrs Myles, you know me of old.”

“I always knew you were good and kind, doctor,” said Lizzie, “although you often turned the wrong side of the cloth to me.”

“Indeed!” said the doctor, and my ears, for ever on the stretch, heard, or thought they heard in that little word, an amount of meaning that might have filled one of the three volumes of a novel.

Next morning Fanny set off for New Broom, and towards evening Miss Betsy Morgan arrived to take her place beside me. I was surprised, although I was incapable of expressing it. I was past expressing that or anything else. Dr England had sent for her, she said, “and as her hoose was toom, she just thraved aboot the key, pat it in her pouch, and cam off.” So there she was, mistress of the situation at once ; a most effective nurse, and she said, “I was a rael gude patient, an’ easy dune wi’.” She banished the clumsy servant from the room, and kept things straight and tidy herself—an infinite relief to me.

When Mary arrived she ran upstairs into my room, and bending over me, said in a broken voice, "Rachel, Rachel," and I felt a tear drop on my face.

I said, "Mary, you have been long, long of coming."

"I couldn't help it, Rachel—I couldn't leave them till Fanny came; it was impossible."

"I doubt you make idols of your children, Mary," and I smiled faintly.

While she staid, Miss Betsy kindly and considerately left us a good deal to ourselves. It was long since we two had lived together, with no one to come between us; we went back to that time; as we talked together of our father and mother, and the home of our childhood, I could not help remarking that, considering we had been left orphans so early, we had reason to be thankful. "Your lot, Mary," I said, "is all your heart could wish; mine does not seem so enviable, but it satisfies me. Do you know I would have prevented your marriage if I could, so short-sighted was I; I had my doubts; but all's well that ends well."

"Yes," she said absently, and then she suddenly asked, "What of Mrs Morgan, Rachel?"

"Nothing new about her, and nothing very bad recently, so far as I know."

"It's a terrible thing; do you think, Rachel, that a confirmed drunkard ever really reforms?"

"I think so—it must be a desperate effort, such as, fortunately, neither you nor I have any means of gauging—but it is possible."

"Possible!" she faintly echoed.

She happened to be standing where the light fell full upon her, and I said, "Mary, it strikes me that you are a good deal thinner and paler than you used to be, and at this moment there is a look of anxiety in your face—do you feel quite well?"

"Quite well—I daresay I am thinner at present. I have been very anxious about you, but that's past, and we have nothing to do but look cheerful. I'll read to you now for a little, and if you fall asleep, so much the better."

She read, and the soothing cadence of her tones soon set me to sleep. When one is just beginning to be conscious of returning health, is there anything so delicious as being lulled to sleep by a dear familiar voice? Before you are aware of it, you feel your senses being stolen gently away, and a heavenly oblivion descending over you, bodily weakness, mental turmoil, hurrying thought all yield to the magic influence, and sweetly you glide into the land of rest.

I had not slept very long when I was roused by a sound, probably some noise in the house; I lay collecting my senses, wondering where I was, and who I was, when I was startled by a low, convulsive sob in the room. I opened my eyes; it had grown dark, but the fire blazed brightly, and by its light I could see there was no one in the room but Mary. She was kneeling at a chair by the side of the fire, her head bent down on it. Suddenly she raised it, and I heard her say, "Oh God, save him—save him;

let no sin have dominion over him ; forbid that a slur be cast on thy holy religion ; for thine own sake, save him ;" her head sank again on the chair, and she spoke no more. I think she was quite unconscious that she had been speaking aloud. I was greatly disturbed—a creeping sensation went all over me ; what was the meaning of it ? Was it John, her husband—that she prayed for thus fervently and with sobs ; what was it ? What horrible thing was impending ? By and by, she rose, calmed herself, and sat down by the fire, thinking that I still slept. I made a movement, and she was immediately beside me, showing no sign of her recent emotion. She hoped I had had a pleasant sleep.

"Most pleasant," I said ; "and I feel so much better, Mary, that I think it is selfish to keep you any longer, you must be anxious to get home, now ?"

"Rachel," she said, "I am loath to leave you, but——"

"But you are wearying to get home ; it is quite natural, it would be a pity if you didn't. I think you ought to go to-morrow ; and you can tell Fanny and John that I am quite independent, now."

I dared not ask her a question. If she had wished to speak of anything, to ask counsel or sympathy, to whom would she have gone but to me, and she had not ; in all our close, private intercourse, during the fortnight she had been with me, she had never said a word of any

cause for anxiety she might have; so I could ask no questions, I could only reiterate her prayer.

She was deeply moved when she left me, but I bade her good-bye with a cheerful countenance, and said, "that the next time she came, she must bring John and the children, or they must bring her, and not be long of doing so."

I knew Fanny would return to us immediately, and I counted the hours till she came, for I thought I might get some information from her. The moment she entered the door, my spirit felt lighter. There were no evil tidings in her face, it was radiant with health and happiness, and "dear John and the children were all so well!" My fears were dispelled, but still that impassioned cry would haunt me.

Miss Betsy Morgan did not hurry her departure yet for a while; she said, "As she was here, she might as weel break the back o' the winter afore she gaed hame," which she accordingly did. The doctor and she were great friends; I imagine they had been long acquainted. I used to hear her bringing up the histories of people that he had lost sight of—she seemed never to lose sight of any one. Often these biographies were very entertaining, given as they were in her racy doric, and not losing anything in the telling. Sometimes they had a tragic and melancholy tinge, as on one occasion, when I awoke from a kind of doze,—the doctor and Miss Betsy were sitting by the hearth waiting till I should awake—she was saying, "Weel, thae

reports are fleeing; do ye think there's ony truth in them?"

"I doubt it," he said, "I very much doubt it—I reasoned with him, and warned him, and told him what it would come to; he said it was between him and his God what he had suffered, and how he had struggled,—I've seen him on his knees about it—"

"Dearsakes! it's waesome, eh! it's waesome; for himsel', an' the cause, an' his family, an' his faither—it'll bring him sair doon, puir man, but it'll no change his mind; if ony thing wad hae done that, it wad hae been Sandie an' his mother."

"By the by, what has become of Sandie? I have heard nothing of him for years."

"The less the better,—he was aulder than you, I think?"

"Yes, a year or two; but we were at college together,—he had very good abilities."

"He was the cleverest amang them; something like his auldest sister; if she had been a man, she wad hae gaen the same road."

"Heaven forbid!" said the doctor earnestly.

"Ye may say that," said Miss Betsy; "four infants died atween him an' his brither, an' I aye think o' them in the quiet kirkyard wi' satisfaction, whan I think o' him; eh, he was a muckle made o' bairn—I see him yet in a bit blue velvet coatie he had, wi' his hair hingin' doon ower't in lang curls—the pride his mother had in thae curls—he was a bonnie bairn."

"The last thing I heard of him was that he

was sentenced to four years' penal servitude for swindling."

"Jist that—weel he had been something mair than a year an' a half in confinement, whan ae nicht jist in the gloamin' he cam to my door; sic a start as I got. I says, 'Losh, Sandie, is that you?' 'Aye,' says he, 'it's me in the body, give me my supper and I'll convince you.' So I took him in, an' set doon the bread an' cheese, but I could do little but look at him. I says, 'Sandie, hoo are ye here—ye're time's no up?' 'My time's up,' says he. That prison has been a blessing to me—I'm a converted man now, a saint;' an' he burst into a roar o' laughin' it was awfu' to hear; then he flung something on the table, an' bade me look at that. I got oot my specs and took it up, and sure eneuch, it was what ye ca' a ticket o' leave, wi' the particulars o' his imprisonment and dismissal marked on't, an' a bit parchment preened till't, wi' his character written on't—he had behaved weel it said baith at his wark and in the prison—by ordinar' weel. 'Now,' says he, 'you see I'm a gentleman at large, with the best of characters; there's nothing like early training—store a child's memory with texts and hymns, and he will find them of use many days after;' and he laughed that fearfu' laugh again. 'The idiotic old chaplain had more comfort in me than in any of his converts.' I says, 'Losh, Sandie, haud ye're tongue, for ony sake, ye're eneuch to bring doon fire and brimstone on the hoose—does ye're faither ken ye're oot o' the prison?'

‘That he does—I enclosed that precious document to him, to let him see that his son had a good character, and told him to send it back as I couldn’t afford to lose it. The fact is, put a pious and intelligent Scotchman in any situation, and he is sure to take the prizes—do you not feel your patriotism glow? Now bring out the whisky bottle.’ ‘Sandie,’ I said, ‘I’ll no deny that I hae a drap in the hoose in case o’ sickness, but ye’ll no get it—I’ll no hae’t on my conscience that I gied ye onything to mak’ ye mair the offspring o’ Sautan than ye are. Oh man, hae ye nae thocht? Do ye never mind whan ye was a bit innocent bairn, an’ you an’ me used to gang gatherin’ buckies at the sea-side, wi’ ye’re bit toy cart an’ spade. Do ye never think o’ a’ ye micht hae been?’ He started up wi’ a great oath that I’ll no come ower, and said, ‘What’s the use of sniveling—if I can’t get a dram here, I’ll go where I’ll get it. Remember me in your prayers. The old idiot who got this for me,’ and he picked up his ticket—‘said he would do that,’ and he was oot at the door or ever I kent. I lookit into the darkness after him, an’ cried Sandie! Sandie! I thocht I wad try anither appeal, but I hae never seen him since—it was lang or I got the better o’ that veesit. I could’na get him oot o’ my head—to think he was a reprobate!’

“And how does he live?” asked the doctor.

“Weel, his faither gies him twa pound a-week, paid every Monday morning on condition that he never shows his face within sae many miles

o' him, an' whiles he writes in newspapers an' periodicals—he has nae want o' abilities—an' there was a while he was a policeman,—I thocht that a dacent berth, if he could hae keepit it; an' whiles he's ae thing, an' whiles anither. It's a wonder that he's livin', takin' into account the life he's led—he has been a dear son to his faither. I think if his brither ——”

Here the doctor became aware that I was not sleeping, and putting his finger on his lips he stopped Miss Betsy's farther communications. I wondered why I should not hear what did not seem a secret, and what to me was not a matter of personal interest. The doctor certainly thought that I was very easily excited, and that excitement was not good for me. But I was interested. Miss Betsy had outlined a phase of life entirely new to me and very painful; but I had been fascinated, and I resolved to take an opportunity of asking more about this prodigal son, who, I concluded, belonged to some family in which she had been a servant in her youth; but next day she left unexpectedly, and I never had the opportunity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOME weeks after this, when I was quite recovered, only not so strong as could be wished, the doctor recommended change of air, and I

was on the point of setting off for West Valley, to visit the Acroyds, when intelligence came of Mrs Morgan's serious illness. She had fallen on the corner of a piece of furniture in her room. It was supposed at first that the injury was insignificant, but inflammation had set in, and the medical men were apprehensive. Within an hour, Mr Morgan and Fanny left L—, but their haste and their journey were alike idle; before they got to their destination, Mrs Morgan was gone—dead. I make no remark. Death—sudden death in any case is sufficiently appalling. Every other event stands utterly beggared in importance alongside of this one. If finite capacities could take in the full significance of this monosyllable, the whole business of earth would come to a stand.

Fanny bore up bravely till she and her father got home again, then she gave in, fairly overwrought in body and mind; it was some days before she was able to be out of bed.

Mr Morgan's friends rose up to comfort him, but I question if he was comforted. I daresay some of them privately remarked that it was not a death to be lamented; rather, it must be a relief. So did not her husband and family feel it; it was to them a very bitter bereavement, much more so than if she had gone from among them in full honour.

John and Mary, with their children, came from New Broom—I had little expected a visit from them so soon—and Miss Betsy Morgan returned also.

We were all in the drawing-room except Fanny, who was not able to be down stairs; Mrs Myles was with us, and Charles Brown was present, in virtue of the relation in which he stood to Fanny—have I said, no, I don't think I have, that by this time they were engaged to be married. It was the evening Mrs Morgan's remains were to be brought home previous to burial. We were all sitting hushed and silent, expecting that mute arrival. We heard wheels stop outside, then doors open and shut, and all was still.

Suddenly, the door of the room in which we were was flung open, and in walked a man. We all looked up and looked round except Mr Morgan—he was sitting in an arm-chair, with his face bent down between his hands—he never moved. The new comer advanced into the room, looked round, and said, "Quite a family party; I'm just in the nick of time."

Mr Morgan raised his head, apparently without being surprised, the shock of his wife's death had killed lesser emotions; and he said, "Sandie, do you know that your mother is dead?"

"To be sure I do. I came in with her, and saw her go up stairs quietly, and steadily enough this time."

"Think shame!" burst from Miss Betsy's lips; "d'ye no see the distress your faither's in?"

"Does he see the distress I'm in? Curse it, my mother always said she'd leave me her money, and I'll have it, or the lion's share of it

—am I to go sneaking about without a copper and you all rolling in riches?”

“Sandie,” said Miss Betsy, “ye’ve taen to ye’rsel ither seven deevils, an’ they’ll turn an’ rend ye some day.”

“Ask John,” he said; “he knows about devils; there’s one escorts him to the pulpit sometimes. My kind don’t snivel and preach.”

A horrible idea crossed my thoughts. Was this man whom I had seen several times before, and whom I at once recognized, was this the “Sandie” of whom Miss Betsy and Dr England had been speaking; and if so, who was the brother they bewailed as likely to follow his steps? it wasn’t David, it couldn’t be John—was there still another unknown to me?

I looked at John Morgan, he visibly trembled from head to foot. Lizzie’s eyes were ablaze with excitement, but she spoke not. David bent his head to the ground, and studied the carpet; across Mr Morgan’s face there wandered something that bore a dreary resemblance to a smile. I have seen that expression oftener than once on the faces of men stricken with anguish, and he said in a voice that had a far away kind of sound, “Sandie, if you have no feeling for your mother’s death, you are lost indeed.”

“Feeling!” cried the prodigal son; “how long is it since I took her watch just out of sheer regard,” and he laughed a low, dreadful laugh; “and, curse it, it only brought ten pounds?”

Mr Morgan started, as if he had been stung.

Miss Betsy came forward and said, “Sandie,

it's muckle I wad do to save ye, an' I'll never pray for mysel' but I'll pray for you, but I'm no a simpleton, an' if ye dinna mak ye'resel scarce, gin nae ither body do't, I'll send for a policeman as sure as you're stannin' there—an' tak my word for 't, if ye dinna turn ower a new leaf ye'll soon find ye'resel in a place where nae hypocrisy 'ill impose, an' where tickets o' leave 'ill no be granted."

At this juncture, Charles Brown rose, and laying his weighty hand on the man's shoulder said, "Come, Mr Morgan, you'll go with me—you remember me? we are old acquaintances you know." Whether it was Miss Betsy's threat that induced him to go—for though neither drunk nor sober he was quite capable of knowing that she would put it in execution—or whether Mr Brown's strength of arm carried him from the room, I don't know, but they went away together, leaving behind as woe-begone a party as I think ever sat in a handsome room with all the external appliances of comfort.

I felt glad to betake myself up stairs, and Mrs Myles soon followed me. She sat down in her old seat and began as abruptly as of yore; "Rachel, I've had but two concealments from you—the one about George Myles, and the other about my unfortunate brother, Alexander. I have often wondered you did not ferret both out, especially about Sandie, after that memorable night at Leerielaw."

"Of the first," I said, "I never had the faintest glimmer, the other I had turned over

and over in my mind repeatedly, but certainly the right explanation never occurred to me."

"It was curious you didn't come to know of him some way, for, of course, his existence is no secret, although he is too painful a subject for us to speak of—even Fanny did not know of him for long. He is nearly ten years older than John, and he was quite young when papa put him into one of his shops, and how soon he went to destruction I dare not tell; at last, he had to be banished from the house, that was when Fanny was a mere child, and after that his name was never mentioned. But he wrote continually asking money. Papa gave him a regular, stated sum, and forbade us all to give him another penny. John and David stood firm, and mamma was kept short enough for her own wants, but he worked upon my feelings and fears till I gave him every penny and pound almost that I could scrape together. Oh! Rachel, it has been a history dismal beyond conception; I don't think one solitary spark of kindly generous feeling is left in him. One day, it was before you came, Fanny came in from school in a dreadful state. Some of the girls had taunted her with her blackguard brother; she had never heard of him before, and rushed to me to hear that it wasn't true. I couldn't say that, and it was long before I could get her soothed into any kind of composure. I had to tell her the whole story; she has never spoken of him since. I have the idea that she thinks he is dead, and if she does, it is as well; it is a mercy she

wasn't down stairs to-night, so don't speak of it at all to her."

"But," I said, "Charles Brown seemed to know him quite well."

"Yes, but he knows, too, not to speak of it to her,—trust him, he wouldn't let a fly alight if he thought it would annoy Fanny. Alexander once chanced upon lodgings in the house that Charles Brown was living in; he had an illness, and staid there two or three weeks; Charles showed him much attention, which, like everything else, was entirely thrown away."

"Lizzie, have you any other brother, I don't know of?"

She could not forbear smiling. "Rachel," she said, "you are going to give your imagination the reins now, I think—no, no, one of that kind is surely enough."

Still this "Sandie" must be the same Miss Betsy and the doctor spoke of; there were too many similar points in the history to doubt that, but in my half roused state, I must have mixed two of Miss Betsy's stories,—in some way I was mistaken about the brother that had been mentioned.

What new arrangements Mr Morgan made with his first-born son, or if he made any such, I do not know; shortly after this he disappeared; it was believed he had left the country, and up to this present time of writing, he has never been heard of again. I have no doubt that some few persons weary themselves in picturing forth his imaginary fate, nor have they persuaded

themselves to drop his name from their prayers ; it may be that these prayers have been answered, —the day will disclose it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CALAMITIES seldom come singly. Mary and John were on the point of returning home, when both of their children were seized with what was shortly pronounced to be scarletina; and it was evident that, even if the disease were of a mild type, they could not be removed for some time. Mary, of course, could not leave them, but John must go back to his duties.

I don't wonder at my blindness, and in the course of this narrative I have so often convicted myself of superior stupidity that I don't think you, reader, will wonder at it either. So I felt surprised when beginning to make arrangements, Mary said to me, "I can't tell you, Rachel, how vexed I am at the idea of John going home alone; he'll be terribly dull without me and the children."

"I daresay he will," I said; "but he'll have his work, arrears to bring up too; besides, I would think that, at such a time as this, he would feel a week or two of solitude a melancholy luxury."

"Some people that might suit and benefit, but not John, he doesn't do with solitude. I

would ask Fanny to go with him, but I don't think she is very able, nor could she do much to cheer him at present. I really wish, Rachel, instead of going to West Valley you would go to New Broom."

"And leave you ——," I was exclaiming, when John came into the room, accompanied by Dr England.

I said, "John, do you suppose there are many wives like yours?"

"No, I don't."

"Nor I either. What do you think she proposes? that she should be left to nurse the children alone, while I go to cheer, amuse, and wait upon the Sultan at New Broom—what do you think of that?"

"I think it is very foolish, but very like her."

"You know, Miss Noble," said the doctor, "a woman's first duty is to think of her husband, her last to think of herself."

"Don't say that *I* know—I know nothing of the kind."

"Self-sacrifice," pursued he, "is woman's element."

"Not mine."

"No," said he, "elderly, unmarried ladies are scarcely in a position to understand the sort of thing——"

"Certainly not," I said; "I agree with you there—long may it be before they are; I, for instance, am weak and wicked enough to think that a man should look after his wife, rather than be looked after by her."

The doctor had edged very near me, and he said, in a faint whisper, "Go;" then to John, "I think, Mr Morgan, you should take Miss Noble with you, she ought to have had change of air before this; I will see that Mrs Morgan does not over-fatigue herself. I am glad to say that I think the children are likely to get very easily over it."

"Well," I said, "I would much rather stay and help Mary, but I suppose a doctor's word is law."

"Always," he said; "I am glad to find that you have correct views on some points."

Again John Morgan and I set out on our travels together. My thoughts went back to that first journey we two had taken to West Valley, a long time since now, although it did not look so. That was a bright autumnal day; this was a day in early spring, fresh and breezy. John sat silent and thoughtful, and I must say I was hardly in a mood to fulfil my mission of trying to cheer him. I had never arrived at New Broom before that Mary had not been there to welcome me, and I thought if I was sent to cheer John, somebody ought to have been sent in the first place to cheer me. We sat down to our meal without a word, but at length John shivered the silence with a kind of stage effect by saying gloomily, "Rachel, did you ever find life to be a burden?"

"Yes, I have. I daresay most people have at times, although I don't doubt they would shoulder the burden very quickly again if told that a

wish would release them from it. I have heard of a woman who was under a terrible temptation to commit suicide; she went to her minister for advice; he preached to her, reasoned with her, exhorted her, warned her, and entreated her, time after time, all to no purpose, till at length she arrived upon him one Saturday afternoon, just as he had fairly stuck in the getting up of his sermon—you perhaps can sympathise with him—and said that things had come to a head, she *must* take away her life. The old Adam getting the better of the good man for the moment, he turned to her and said, 'Well, well, just go and do it.' The woman went home, set about her neglected work, and no more was heard of her temptation."

"That's a good story, Rachel, but the depression that work can dissipate is not very deeply seated; add remorse—add remorse—and you haven't very far to go for the worm that dieth not, for the vulture preying on the vitals—hell can begin on earth."

"Yes, it can, but it can end there too; there is still room for repentance—you don't often have cases of that kind opened up to you?"

"They are sometimes not far to seek," and rising, he went to the window.

"Come," I said, "we must go out and see what things are like in the garden."

We walked leisurely round it. The air was chilly. I can't say that I take an enthusiastic interest in cabbage and broccoli, but keeping in view the *rôle* assigned me by Mary, I made

some spirited remarks on these vegetables. As yet there wasn't much else to remark on, but John went off on a different tack.

"Rachel," he said, "every nook of this garden has a page of my history in it; if I leave this place my spirit will often come back here to do penance."

"Leave it! why what are you speaking about?"

"What, indeed? Nonsense, I daresay. I'm so much in the habit of talking when alone, that I sometimes forget that I am not alone. You should go in, Rachel, you look cold. I wish to walk for a little yet."

"But they said I was to cheer you. Now, what can I do for you? Have a nice glass of toddy ready when you come in?" said I smiling, quizzically, as an abstainer can.

"Good God!—I beg your pardon. Rachel, you've heard of a place that is paved with good intentions. So is this garden. The clods know it; the earth-worms are in the secret; the birds sing it; and so Mary sent you to take care of me, poor woman!"

"John, John, what is it? Do tell me what you mean?"

"I mean well. I have the very best intentions; but go in, Rachel, go in. I'll wander here for a while. I like the gathering darkness, and I have my sermon to think over."

I left him. I thought I had known him very thoroughly, but I had never seen him in such an unaccountable mood as this, for I did

not think his mother's death wholly accounted for it. I did my best to win him from the gloom and depression that hung over him, but throughout the week the cloud never rose. He was a good deal in his study, and on Sunday his sermon was a more eloquent one than I had heard him preach. He took for his text the words of Paul, "Lest, having preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away," and drew a powerfully graphic picture of the insidious nature of sin; how one who had put his hand to the plough might draw back to perdition; and dwelt upon the awful and hopeless fate of the castaway, in a manner that transfixed the attention of every one present. He was least touched himself; there was a stoniness about his appearance and voice, that fitted ill with the searching nature of his subject, and the gloom of the week permeated the services. Conceive my surprise when we met at dinner to find him in high spirits; positively exhilarated, almost boisterous. It was a sudden and unnatural change, and, to me, as unaccountable as his previous depth of depression. But this new found hilarity could not infect me; it did not seem genuine enough for that. Nor did it last long. Next morning he was as gloomy as ever, and I felt in a state of extreme discomfort. I proposed that, the day being fine, we should take a long walk, but he said he was not equal to it; that he was going up stairs to rest, and if any one called, he was not to be disturbed. I went up with him, and

saw him comfortably settled on the sofa of his library. He thanked me in a queer, humble way, and said he was not worthy of my kindness. I said, "John, you are not to speak in that way. I don't understand what has come over you. You are the only brother I have, and if there is anything under the sun I could do for you, I would be glad to do it."

"There is nothing you can do for me, Rachel," he said sadly, "nothing—just leave me, if this unbearable feeling goes off—don't be alarmed, it is nothing deadly, leave me to rest a little, I'll be down stairs to dinner, I hope, but don't let any one up."

Accordingly I left him with no easy mind certainly, but didn't see what else I could do; and I gave his orders to the servants, impressing it on them that he was not to be disturbed.

Various people on various business called in the course of the day, and were not admitted; some of them wished to see me, in particular two men whom I did not know; and when I explained matters to them, I observed them exchange looks; I said, if their business was urgent, they might see Mr Morgan after dinner.

Towards the dinner hour, I went up stairs to see how he was. I opened his door very softly; instantly a strong smell of spirits met me; he was lying on the sofa drunk, with a tumbler near him in which had been whisky. The door of a press stood open which I had never seen open before, and in it was a large jar of whisky with the cork out. I don't pretend to say how

I felt at that moment; in truth, I think I did not feel; I was almost turned to stone for some seconds, and then I did not think of myself, or even of him, but of Mary. This, then, was the secret, the mystery to which every straw flung up had pointed, if I had only been able to see. What Mary must have suffered—the slow torture of the Indian at the stake,—and she had borne it with apparent Indian stoicism, and with her own angelic patience. I looked at John; I did not know what to do—the sight was more than I could bear. I left the room, using the precaution of locking the door and taking the key with me. I went down into the garden to get the cool air and gather my thoughts.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCEALMENT, I thought—was concealment possible? and this idea actually occupied my mind for a time so entirely, that it seemed something outside the overwhelming discovery that John was a drunkard, but alone as I was, it did not appear possible that I could manage it; nay, likely the truth was more than suspected already, and I again saw the look my two visitors had exchanged, and these two men would return in a short time; indeed, I kept my eye on the garden door, dreading to see them enter, and in a few minutes it opened, but instead of them,

who should enter but Dr England! In other circumstances he would have been most welcome, and, as it was, I felt thankful to see him rather than any other person. On looking back I could see that he had long known what had burst upon me a little ago as a new discovery, but I was deeply grieved and ashamed that he should arrive to see my brother—my only brother—at such a moment.

He came quickly forward; before I could speak, he said, "What is it, Miss Noble? I dreaded this—I am afraid I did wrong in exposing you to the chance of such a trial, but I thought if anything could avert it, it would be your presence. Where is he?"

I pointed to the study windows.

"I could not rest," he went on, "till I came to see how you were doing, and I'll stay till I see him over it; try not to distress yourself more than possible; there's everything to hope—his is a very different case from many; I hope and believe that ultimately he will conquer—he has every motive."

"So he has had all along—so had his mother—so has his brother. I don't see a single spot of light, look where I like, and to think of Mary and the children."

"Mary doesn't despair—she is an angel—and we shouldn't either; even if he has to leave this place, he may—he will retrieve himself elsewhere; try to live in that faith; sadly as he has fallen, I believe he is a good man, and his remorse and struggles will not surely be in vain."

"It is so awful," I said, "and it has come upon me so suddenly, that I cannot ——," and I burst into a passion of tears—I could not control myself. I had loved John well; much as I had pitied his mother, she had never cost me tears. We stood still for a time, then the doctor said, "I was a fool to send you here, but I did it for the best."

"I must have known sometime—how are the children? this has driven everything from my mind."

"They are doing well; there needs be no anxiety about them."

"Come," I said, "you must be hungry."

"Not exactly," he said, smiling; "but we'll go in and have dinner; first, however, I must see our patient."

We went in, and we saw the two men, who had called in the forenoon, coming down the stairs. Grief and concern were in their faces; still I thought they could not have got into his room as I had the key in my pocket, but they had. I had forgotten that there was another door that entered off a small side room; when the servant found she could not open the one door, and that Mr Morgan did not speak, she supposed he had gone out, and wondering what was wrong with the lock, went in by the other to ascertain; the men accompanied her, one of them being, she said, handy about locks, and there with their own eyes they had seen their minister drunk.

The parishioners became divided into three parties; those who wished to give their minister

another trial, these were few, and I did not wonder; those who thought his usefulness gone, and that to continue him in office would be a scandal, these were numerous, and I didn't wonder at that either; the third class considered this second party were the minister's enemies, that they were "ill-using" him, and they came forward with their sympathy and offered to stand by him to the last—these were all the questionable characters in the parish. This was not the least bitter drop in the cup of desperate humiliation that John had filled for himself—the being claimed as "hail fellow well met" by all the choice spirits who did not think a whit the less of the minister because he took his glass freely.

Ecclesiastical machinery was shortly put in motion against him, and the stricken man made no defence, nor attempted any palliation. The end was that he resigned his office. I never saw a man so humbled, or a woman exert herself as Mary did to shield him. So far as in her lay she stood between him and every breath, or look, that could be interpreted to mean reproach; but do as she might, she could not pick the thorns from his conscience, or restore his self-respect, neither could she withdraw from his physical nature the terrible craving to struggle with which he only knew what it cost.

They did not come to Honeycomb House when they left New Broom. Mary would not expose her husband to the possibility of an upbraiding word from his father, although I don't think

that knowingly Mr Morgan would have so addressed him. This had not come so suddenly on him as it had on me; he had heard the rumours that had been current for a long time, although without giving them credit; still his mind had been familiarized to the possibility of the thing, but it must have been a dreadful blow to him, I wondered how he stood it as he seemed to do. As for Fanny, her grief was pitiable to see when she allowed it to burst its barriers; but following Mary's example, she exerted herself to be cheerful, and hope the best. I did what I could to give the comfort to her that I could not take to myself, and Charles Brown's broad shoulders were always ready and willing to bear the heavier share of all her burdens.

Dr England invited John and Mary to be his guests for a time, and he devoted himself to John with a brother's love, but, if John winced under reproach, he winced still more under so much delicate and unwearied kindness; and Mary hastened their preparations for leaving the country, to seek another home on the opposite side of the globe, where they would be unknown, and might begin life anew. Ah, begin life anew! Can the past be blotted out? Could he forget all that he had forfeited—all that she for his sake had forfeited, home, country, kindred? Would he enter the vessel on this side the ocean one man, and leave it on the opposite shore another? Is there any drug that will bleach clean and white a stained and sullied

memory? Such spots will finally fade away only in the light of the Sun of Righteousness.

And my sister was to be torn from me. I had rebelled sorely when, to all appearance, she was entering on as happy a lot as falls to many; how was I to bear this? The thought of her wandering in a strange land, the sole prop of a broken-spirited, jaded man, who might at any time relapse into that fearful habit which had already cost them everything that makes life dear, crushed me. And how part with the children who were, if possible, dearer to me now than ever! But all this was to be. George Myles had a brother, a decent, respectable man, who had been a farm-steward, it was his wish to emigrate, and as John Morgan meant to turn farmer, he engaged him to go with him, and the nurse, who had always been with the children, volunteered to go also. It was in its way a great comfort to us that they had two such efficient, worthy servants along with them.

I dare not speak of the parting on the deck of that outward-bound ship. Mary stood with her arm in her husband's, and smiled to the last. We hear regularly from them, and as yet things have gone well with them. John has never preached—in time he may;—but I think it the best sign of the genuineness of his reformation that he feels himself unworthy of this privilege. It is the fashion in these days for converts from recent wickedness to raise their voices to teach their fellow-men, and I do not pass an opinion on them—temperaments differ,—but I prefer

that a man go aside into the wilderness for a time, and try to know himself, before he teaches others.

If I were making a story, instead of relating one, I would say that Messrs Morgan & Son, seeing so much of the evils of drunkenness, relinquished all connection with the trade; but I cannot sacrifice truth to effect, and any one walking through the streets of L—— will see all the shops of Morgan & Son as flourishing as ever.

I leave it to the young to imagine that the other persons of this history ever after this lived happy, and died happy when their time came; but more I cannot say at present. This is the experience of Rachel Noble; and if I were to go on a little farther, I would trench on the experience of Rachel England.

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