

iced her glass of water, but he was too courteous—and perhaps too indifferent—to remark upon it, or to persuade her to take wine. He had studied history and philosophy, languages, and law, but not the nature of alcohol. In pressing his bride to join the guest in drinking to her father and mother it was simply because he did not wish to see her conspicuous by a departure from common usage.

Millicent's father and mother were accustomed to her avoidance of wine. They themselves were very moderate people, brought up in the old school, but a chance remark of the family physician had caused them to give their children milk and cocoa, as more nourishing. When Lena was seventeen she had heard a temperance sermon in church, and as a result signed the pledge, and became a worker in a branch of the C. E. T. S.; and although she had been unable to persuade Millie into active co-operation she had yet influenced her sufficiently to follow her example of personal abstinence. Nor had the parents offered any objection. Theirs was a tolerant sort of rule, and if sometimes the younger brothers, Reginald and Frank, made a remark upon the subject at table they were instantly checked, Mr. Anderson observing on one occasion:

'You let Lena alone. It can't do any harm to take none, but wine ruins a good many who do take it.'

Mr. Anderson might have said much more. His father had been a wine merchant. The days of his youth were noted for drunkenness in the upper and middle classes, causing impoverishment and degradation. As he could more cheaply supply his own cellar from the business stores, the temptations to drink to excess were enhanced. As a matter of fact, grandfather Anderson developed the passion to such an extent that he died from what we now describe as chronic alcoholism, or slow poisoning by intoxicating drink.

It may be that the example was sufficiently awful to deter the son from a like indulgence; in part, perhaps, it was due to the growth of more enlightened views as the result of the temperance reformation, or it may be that by the curious and apparently erratic laws of heredity the passion for drink was absent from Millicent's father; at any rate, he had never evinced any immoderate desire for that poison which had killed the wine merchant. He held a partnership in an important firm of auctioneers, and was able to live in a good-sized villa at Richmond, and surround his family with a considerable measure of refinement and luxury.

CHAPTER II.—A DORMANT APPE- TITE AROUSED.

To this day Millicent remembers the sensations caused by her wedding glass of champagne. The day of her marriage is surely the most outstanding event of a woman's life, and many features connected with it are graven on her memory. But the burning of her throat by that fiery liquid Millicent is still conscious of, the rush of blood to her head, the apparently new life and vigor which for a few minutes possessed her, the exhilaration of feeling and buoyancy of spirit so new and so strange she can yet recall. It was practically a state of intoxication or drunkenness, the tablespoonful of liquor being as potent in its influence on her as a whole bottleful would have been to her grandfather.

Nature is ever seeking to accommodate

itself to habit, and man's physical system is very tolerant to violations of law inflicted by the will of the soul upon the organs of the body. In the long run nature holds its own, and compels to pay the price of transgressing her rules. But in Millicent's case there had been no slow preparation of her physical system to meet the onslaught of this new poison. The bare teaspoonful of alcohol which the wine glass contained was a deadly irritant, and acted upon her whole being as would a strong dose of any other drug. Indeed, its effect was so strong that, she nearly fell back into her chair, and the whirl of thought the wine produced made her indeed glad to resume her seat. In a few minutes the active, intoxicating effect passed away, and some of the exhilaration remained. An unexpected cheerfulness possessed her as she went to put on her travelling costume, and the friends noticed with some surprise and approval that the tears usually shed by a bridal daughter on leaving home were in Millicent's case absent.

But the double excitement of the wedding and of the wine could not, and did not, last long. Some measure of despondency ensued, and the railway journey was not that hour of bliss on which George Mordaunt had counted. And, indeed, he had so mistaken the cause that on their arrival at Dover, en route for Switzerland, he suggested her taking another glass of wine. Poor Millicent, not being able to analyse her feelings and experiences, remembered only the strange sense of delight produced by the first glass, and readily assented to the second. The second effect was not so marked as the first, but it restored her spirits in some measure, and in her ignorance she may be pardoned for mistaking the effect of alcohol. She had yet to learn the full meaning of the Bible declaration, that 'Wine is a mocker—be not deceived thereby.'

The truth is that Millicent Mordaunt was specially unfitted to cope with the temptation. The immediate effects described would have been precisely the same in the case of any young woman, maiden or wife, who had suddenly for the first time taken a similar quantity of intoxicating liquor. But in this granddaughter of the drunken wine merchant—and the case is no uncommon one, although it is sometimes hidden in the comparatively unknown word of atavism, which describes the passing over by disease of one generation—a dormant appetite had been awakened. The seed which by heredity had been implanted in the girl Millicent at birth, and which for two and twenty years had remained hidden, because never brought into contact with alcoholism, had suddenly germinated. Every additional glass developed its life, and induced a craving for more.

Young Mrs. Mordaunt was indeed a woman to be pitied. The very weakness engendered by her grandfather's love of wine had by some mysterious operation of nature passed over to her, affecting both her will and her physical powers, and enervating both. Now, at the most critical epoch in her history, her constitutional weakness of will left her without strength to resist temptation, and that very temptation had found in her physical system the most fertile soil in which to develop. It was like a fire that is laid, and needs only a match. Without any thought of evil, the husband, who was destined to suffer so heavily by the consequences, had himself struck the match. By his persuasive insistence he

had induced her to take that first glass, and so raised a demon of appetite and of longing which it might prove impossible to crush, but which, without that first glass, would never have sprung into being.

Of course, the results were not immediately apparent. All that happened at first was that during the honeymoon Mrs. Mordaunt drank one or two glasses each day at dinner, and her husband was quite glad to see her do so. During the day also, if she felt headachy, or out of sorts she would suffer him to pour out a small glassful, and on one occasion, when they returned after their unusual exercise of climbing, he gave her some brandy. She found that the first effect of this was even more potent than that of wine, and was not averse to her husband's suggestion, that it would be well to have a small flask always at hand.

So the Millicent Mordaunt who, after a month's delightful honeymoon, settled in her new home near Regent's Park, was a different being from the teetotal maiden of 'The Lodge.' She had, like Mother Eve, eaten of a deadly apple, or rather drunk of a deadly poison.

And it was the seed sowing of a terrible harvest of personal and relative suffering.

CHAPTER III.—DOWN GRADE.

In the year which elapsed before the birth of Mrs. Mordaunt's first child, the love of drink had fastened itself upon the mother, as a snake coils around its unhappy victim. It was several months before her husband's eyes were opened to the fact that she drank more than was good for her. His profession was that of a solicitor, and he left for the city shortly before ten, returning to dinner at six. He was rarely home to lunch, nor was he aware that in addition to the supply sent in by his wine merchant sundry bottles were supplied in the grocery account.

Millicent's health had hitherto been fairly good, but as winter approached she was ailing, and the doctor, who was called in—a practitioner of the old type—said that what she needed was a tonic. He recommended a glass of bitter ale as an aid to digestion, and in special cases of fainting or weakness a small quantity of spirits. Evidently he had not mastered Sir B. Ward Richardson's lectures on 'Alcohol,' but his advice was palatable to his patient, who found in it a sort of justification for the daily increasing desire she felt for alcoholic liquors; so strong a desire, indeed, that she was unwilling her husband or family should realize its strength.

But her sister Lena had sharp eyes, and a keen scent. Her interest in temperance work had developed, and one result of the monthly meetings she attended, and of the papers she read, was that she understood the special defencelessness of women in fighting the passion for intoxicants. George Mordaunt and his sister-in-law were good friends, and as he felt that his wife must be somewhat lonely during the day he encouraged Lena to visit her as often as possible. Millicent's evident liking for ale or wine at luncheon astonished and pained her, and her remonstrances roused Millicent's anger.

'Why can't you let me alone?' she said, in reply to Lena's last criticism.

'Because I don't like this new habit of yours. You managed to do without it before you were married, and why not after?'

'I didn't know how nice it was, and how refreshing. You don't understand how it sets me up when I don't feel just the thing.'