

THE SLAVES OF KING "FIRE WATER."

I suppose that some little reader will wonderingly say, "Who is King Fire-water? and where does he live? Does he keep a great many slaves, and is he kind to them, or does he treat them very badly?"

And perhaps some little blue-eyed girl who has just learned her geography lesson, and *somewhere* on the map has traced with her rosy fingers those odd words, "Terra del Fuego," or "the land of fire," will venture a shrewd guess that this king with a very strange name lives somewhere in those regions, or perhaps where—as she has read in some pleasant story book—the sun drops like a great red ball into fair tropical seas, making them all one mass of rosy fire. But you are not quite right, dear Blue-eyes, for this king of whom I am going to tell you has a very great kingdom, and you may find his slaves in almost every land under the sun. There are some, I know, in the pleasant city where you live, and some on the sea-shore where you went last summer with your cousins. There are some on the wild western prairies, and some under the burning southern skies, and some sailing on the blue sea. You are sure to know them the minute you see them. *The king does not dress them well. Their clothes are almost always tattered and worn, and their hats knocked in, and your little brother, who has only walked a fortnight without a chair, would feel much mortified to stagger about as they do. King Fire-water never gives his slaves anything to eat, but he has always ready for them a terrible drink—all poison and fire; and the worst of it is, he has taught them to love it, so although they sometimes see that they are growing thin and old, and wretchedly poor, and must very soon die, still they can never refuse it when it is offered, and, indeed, they are so crazy for it, that they are willing to part with everything else they have in the world, rather than go without it.*

Now, when I further tell you that this wicked king makes his slaves sleep in barns and station houses, and, oftener yet, with the miserable pigs in the gutter, you will wonder how he ever finds any one willing to come into his service. But this is the way he manages. When he sees a nicely dressed man whom he wishes to make his slave, he offers him a cup of his best poison. It looks so beautiful, "when it moveth itself aright," like water with a small piece of sunset dissolved in it, and the poor man thinks it *must* be very good. He drinks it, and feels so happy. He thinks he is the richest and greatest man in the world, and Fire-water is a good old king, who has been very much slandered. So he drinks again, and again, but all the while the cruel fire is steadily burning, and by-and-by he suddenly wakes up and finds that it has burned all his patience, and love, and strength, his pleasant home, and all his comforts, and he himself is one of the wretched slaves of King Fire-water. Sometimes he struggles very hard to escape from his tyrant master; but, alas! he generally finds himself bound by the strongest kind of chain. There is a name I have given to this chain. Some people call it "*Habit*," and bad habits are the very worst chains to break I ever knew. Dear Black-eyes, who have stolen back to the dinner table to see if there were any of that pretty red fluid left in the wire glass, and who mean to buy a cigar with your very next pocket money—be careful! Don't let such a chain get wound around you.

Now, I am going to tell you a true story about one of King Fire-water's slaves. He was a grown-up man, and had a wife and four little children—the eldest not more than seven years of age. He had drank so much of the king's poison, that all his money had been burned, and almost all his wife's and children's clothes, and what is more, the last loaf of bread in the house. Now, at the time my story begins, it was winter, almost night, and wretchedly cold. Sue, and Jack, and Sally, had been crying and fretting in chorus for more than an hour, and poor patient baby had nearly sucked off both his thumbs, when, oh, joy! mother came back with some bread and meat, and a little pan of coals. The little starved children had a famous supper, and there was enough left for breakfast.