

Not a long time had elapsed before the cordial became insipid to the taste of Latimer.

"What is this?" said his wife, one evening, as she poured out a glass from the newly replenished bottle.

"Something better than cordial," replied her husband. "Taste it."

The wife sipped a little, and making a wry face, spit it out.

"Brandy!"

"Good old cogniac. Get some water and sugar, and a little nutmeg, Polly, and I'll show you something better than all the cordials that ever were created."

The water, sugar and nutmegs were produced, and two glasses of toddy prepared.

"There! what do you think of that?" said the husband.

"It is good," replied Polly, as she tasted the mixed liquor.

"Better than cordial isn't it?"

"I don't know. The cordial was a very pleasant drink."

"But not half so good as this. Wait until you have tried it a few times, and you'll not think such meagre stuff as cordial worth naming."

And so it proved. The bottle never after contained any thing weaker than brandy, from which a toddy was always prepared for the dinner table, and another to moisten the crackers and cheese that were eaten before going to bed.

Latimer had good wages, and was a steady, industrious hand, much liked by his employer. He lived very comfortably, and had laid up nearly two hundred dollars in the Savings Bank. But after the bottle came into his house, and he began to spend evenings at old Morrison's, his week's wages were usually all spent by the time the earnings of the next were received; and no very long period of time elapsed, before some extra demand for money required a draft upon the fund that had been gradually accumulating in the bank.

Notwithstanding the tavern keeper's eulogy upon his apple toddies and whisky punches, as being the best medicine in the world, Latimer lost more days from sickness in the year that followed than in the five that had gone before the time of his having been presented with the bottle. Nor was his wife's health so good. But they did not think of the real cause.

It is not at all surprising, that it took no longer a period than twelve months to exhaust the money that had been laid up. But this was not the only change. Latimer had grown discontented at home, and impatient with the children. Little Lotty was much oftener thrust petulantly aside than taken upon her father's knee, and the smallest fault of James was too frequently visited with blows under which even a man would have recoiled. There were also occasional violations of the peace between the father and mother themselves, accompanied by harsh words, or days of silence and estrangement on one side, and tears on the other. But still the bottle continued to do its work.

At last, Latimer came so frequently to the shop disguised with liquor, that his employer talked to him on the subject, and told him that, unless he mended his ways, he would have to discharge him. This had a temporary effect; but it did not last long. The principal change it produced, was a restriction of his appetite through the day, to give it greater license in the evening, and it was a common thing for him to go drunk to bed.

How, by this time, had all the pleasant aspects of home disappeared! Agnes was old enough to see the cause; but James and the fair-haired little Lotty felt the change without understanding its meaning. The boy, instead of bounding happily to the side of his father when he returned home, rather shrunk from him, and Lotty approached, and looked into his face timidly, her eye seeking for some of the love-

expressions that once beamed from his countenance. Alas! they were not there then, but had gone forever.

At last the threatening blow fell. Latimer was discharged, and on the strength of it, came home reeling with intoxication.

"Discharged!" said his wife, turning pale with alarm when the truth was, on the next morning, announced to her. "What are we to do?"

"Give me a glass of brandy first. I'm so faint I can hardly hold my head up."

A glass of raw brandy was brought, and he poured the burning fluid eagerly into his throat.

"Do?" he said, as he handed back the emptied glass;

"I reckon there's plenty more shops in town."

A week, and still Latimer was idle. His breath and appearance were enough to prevent his getting work. There were plenty of sober men to be had, and they monopolized the shops, to the exclusion of drunkards. By this time the last wages he had received were all gone, and biting woe looked his family in the face. The distress of his wife, and the miserable aspect of every thing at home, drove him off to the tavern. But this could not buy food, and food must be had, for hunger had entered his dwelling.

"There is nothing to eat in the house!" said his wife, as he came in half tipsy, and after lighting his pipe, sat down before the grate, and thrusting his hands into his pocket, began to smoke—"and the children are hungry. What shall we do?"

"Hush up, will you!" growled the miserable man. Little Lotty, who had been pulling a toy about the floor when her father entered, dropped her play-thing, and going up to where her brother James had sat quietly down, with his sad face and eyes turned towards his besotted parent, crept up into his arms, and putting a hand around his neck, turned also to look at the strange and fearful sight, but without at all comprehending its meaning.

For a few minutes Mrs. Latimer sat bewildered and in tears. Then getting up, she went to a chest of drawers in the room, and, after looking through them, selected a few articles of clothing that she thought could be spared, and laid them out.

For days the bottle had been empty, and Mrs. Latimer's appetite craved the accustomed stimulus. In fact, she felt the want of brandy more than she did the want of food. Taking the bottle, therefore, from the closet, she drew her eldest daughter aside, and said to her:—

"See here, Agnes, take these," and she handed her the garments she had selected, "to Moses, the Jew, and ask him to let you have half a dollar on them. If he does so, he will give you a ticket with the money. Then go with this bottle and get a pint of brandy. As you come home, past the baker's, get two loaves of bread, and half a pound of cheese and three herrings from the grocer's. You will have sixpence left."

"Can't I get some milk for Lotty? She's had no bread and milk for a good many days, and she doesn't like cheese."

"No. There'll be but sixpence left, and I want that for something else. So run along. Lotty will have to do with bread this time, and I'm thankful to be able to get even that for her. I hope your father will get something to do soon, or we shall all starve."

Agnes went on her errand with her young feelings troubled. The Jew took the clothes on pawn for half a dollar, and she got the brandy, the bread, the cheese and the herrings, and brought home the sixpence change.

The sight of the bottle brightened Latimer wonderfully. He drank with his wife, and the children ate greedily the dry bread and cheese. Hunger made it sweet to them. For a little while, a lurid kind of light was in this wretched dwelling, and then all became again dark, cold and gloomy.