

The Gathering Place

I know not where—beneath, above—
The gathering place so wonderful,
But all who fill our life with love
Go forth to make it beautiful.
Oh! wealthy with all wealth of grace,
Of noble heart, of fair, sweet face,
Is that exalted meeting place!

Life changes all our thoughts of heaven;
At first we think of streets of gold,
Of walls as white as snow, wind-driven,
Of lofty arches, grandly cold.
Of gates of pearl and dazzling light,
Of shining wings and robes of white,
And things all strange to mortal sight.

But in the afterward of years
It is a more familiar place;
A home unhurt by sighs and tears,
Where waiteth many a well-known face:
Where little children play and sing,
And maidens and the old men bring,
Their tributes to the gracious King.

With passing months it comes more near,
It grows more real day by day;
Not strange or cold, but very dear,
The glad homeland not far away!
Where no sea toucheth, making moan,
Where none are poor, or sick, or lone,
The place where we shall find our own.

And as we think of all we knew,
Who there have met and part no more,
Our longing hearts desire home, too,
With all the strife and trouble o'er.
So poor the world, now they have gone,
We scarcely dare to think upon
The years before our rest is won.

And yet our Father knoweth best
The joy or sadness that we need,
The time when we may take our rest,
And be from sin and sorrow freed.
So we will wait with patient grace,
Till in that blessed gathering place
We meet our friends, and see His face.

"Turn the Key."

IN one of the narrow courts lying to the westward of Ludgate Hill, and under the shadow of St. Paul's at sunrise, there lives a man who goes by the somewhat singular cognomen of "Turn the Key." His real name is Matthew Gray; but he only hears it from the lips of his nearest friends and such neighbours as have learned to respect him. I am pleased to say that neither are few nor far between.

By trade he is a wood-engraver. Not one of those delicate-fingered men who so skilfully interpret the artist's work on the wood, and give us those magnificent pieces of modern art which adorn the best works of the day; but a ruder craftman, employed to engrave advertisement blocks, posters, and the rougher class of this form of labour generally.

He was quick at his work, and having a good connection with some of the larger advertising agents, did remarkably well for several years prior to his marriage and after it. Then the leprosy of drink got hold of him.

He began in his youth, as others do, with his "regular glass" at meals. As time advanced he took one to "moisten his pipe before going to bed." Next he had an occasional glass between, and finally he took so many that food with him became occasional, and drink fearfully and destructively regular.

Matthew had fallen—in spite of the tears, pleadings, and remonstrances of an affectionate wife—in spite of the gift of two children, and in defiance of the palpable evil the fatal habit was working in his mind and body. The unnatural thirst, the miserable craving, was ever upon him; work and home ties were alike neglected for the dirty, brawling public-house.

And yet as he fell he struggled against his fall—feebly, no doubt, but still he struggled. In the morning he

would rise with fresh resolves to have no more of it, and go sturdily to the attic where he worked, and sitting down upon his stool, put out his pad and arrange his tools. Then came the fatal whisper, "Have one glass—only one; it will freshen you up and carry you through your work of the morning."

He knew the fallacy of that whisper, but he went; and all the morning the light through the window fell upon an empty room and idle tools. Late in the day he would return, maudlin and despairing, and in a slipshod way do part of the work that ought to have been well done hours before.

As usual in such cases, his employers soon learned to distrust him. Unpunctuality, bad work, and the evidence of his failing drove the best of them away, and the rest offered him—what he was obliged to take—less for his labour.

Bound in the fatal chains, moody and despairing, he lived on with his sorrowful wife and children around him. Mrs. Gray was a good woman, and regularly attended a place of worship with her little ones. Her husband, however, had never done so; example and affectionate urgings had alike been thrown away upon him.

"Do give the dreadful drink up, Mat," said his wife one morning. "Pray to God to give you strength, and He will not fail you."

"There's no good in prayer," replied Matthew, moodily. "I've tried my best; but as soon as I get to the bench I'm called away by a voice that is too strong for me."

"It's too strong for many round us," returned his wife. "What good does it do you?"

"None," he said. "I'm not the man I was since I took to it; in fact, I sometimes feel I'm no man at all—I'm a brute."

He sat back in his chair with folded arms, gazing gloomily at his two children, who stood in a corner of the room, whispering to each other fearfully, and wondering why their father frowned so at them. He was not frowning at his children, however. Matthew Gray had fallen, but he had not yet acquired the ferocity which drink gives to some men. He had no desire to maltreat the offspring God had given him.

They were pretty children, a girl and a boy, respectively four and five years of age. The boy was the elder, and a most intelligent little fellow. His wistful blue eyes unconsciously shot keen arrows of reproach at his unbappy father as he looked at him that day.

"Jane, I can't stand it!" said Matthew Gray, rising hurriedly. "If things go on as they are, I shall kill myself."

"Don't talk so wickedly, Mat," said Jane, laying her hands upon his shoulders. "Your life was given for you to use for the glory of God. It is not your own to take away."

"And of what use is my life to me, or to any one?" he asked.

"It would be of use to many, and a blessing to us," replied his wife, "if you gave up drink."

"Ay! there it is," rejoined Matthew.

"I wish I could give it up. And if I could only feel always as I do now it could easily be done; but I know as soon as I try to settle to my bench I shall have a thirst upon me, and out I shall go."

"If I sat with you, Mat," she said, "do you think you could overcome it?"

"I'll try, Jane; but I've doubts of it."

They went upstairs together, and Matthew began his preparations for his day's work. Business had not entirely fallen away from him, and he had enough to do for that day at least. At first he seemed resolute, and drew up his tools and sat down. He took a graving tool in his hand and paused. Jane saw what was coming, and put herself between him and the door.

"It's coming on me," he said, hoarsely; "I must have one glass."

"No, no," she cried; "keep here—for one morning, Mat. It may break the chains, and with God's help they shall never be round you again."

"I can't begin without something," he said, rising. "I'm all to pieces; I have no strength. Let me go; I'll come back surely when I've had one glass."

"No, Mat, it can't be," cried Jane. "I shall break past you," he said, advancing, "and be gone, unless—" he paused, as if some great thought had been suddenly given him—"unless you turn the key."

In a moment it was done. Jane, inspired with a new hope, closed the door, turned the key, and put it into her pocket. "Now, Mat," she said, "I'll not let you have it. If you want it you must take it by force."

He sat down again trembling. The temptation to do so was upon him. For an instant the horrible idea trembled in the balance. His wife understood all. "O merciful Father!" she murmured, "spare him, for our blessed Redeemer's sake." The prayer was breathed and the answer came. Matthew Gray turned, and resting his elbows upon the bench, buried his face in his hands. Great drops of perspiration fell from his brow.

Jane said nothing to him then. Nor when he suddenly began his labours did she speak. A good half-hour had elapsed before a word passed between them.

"Jane," he said suddenly, "I nearly did it."

He did not specify what "it" was, there was no need to do so. Jane, in reply, quietly said, "It was a merciful God who spared you from such a deed."

No reproach, no suggestion as to what her own sufferings would have been, no threat as to what she would have done had he so far forgotten his manhood. He drew his hand across his eyes and came over and kissed her.

"Jane," he said, "the thirst is leaving me. You shall come up every morning and turn the key."

"So I will, Mat," she replied, "until you can turn it yourself."

"I fear that it will be many a day before I do that," he answered sadly.

"If you will listen to me," Jane replied, "you shall do it to-morrow."

He looked at her incredulously; but she met his look with a hopeful smile. "Mat," she said, "it was prayer that saved you from striking me just now. Indeed, it was that, and nothing else. If you doubt me, kneel down now, and see what strength will come of it."

"But I can't pray," he said; "I haven't done such a thing since I was a boy. I don't know a prayer. I've near forgot even that which I learnt at my mother's knee."

"Kneel," she said—"be earnest; give yourself up to thoughts of your

Saviour and your God, and power to pray will come."

He still hesitated, for it is not easy for most men to yield at once to their better instincts or to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Years of indifference to the truths of religion are employed by the enemy of man in building strong outworks around him. But they vanish into thin air if the man himself but yields. Happily, Matthew Gray cast down the breastworks of pride and indifference, and yielded.

Husband and wife were in that room for two hours together. God heard their prayers. The little children were called up to play in the "shop," as Matthew called his attic. They came wonderingly, and the boy on entering put a question which was unconsciously another arrow.

"Isn't father going out to-day?" "Oh no," replied his mother; "father is going to work, and you must play quietly in the corner."

"I am so glad," said the boy; "ain't you, Jenny?"

Jenny lisped her gladness, and they both promised not to disturb their father at work, and Jane went down to her household duties. When she was gone the children experienced yet another surprise. Their father called them over and fondled them. He had never been unkind, but since he had taken to drink, he had not been very demonstrative of affection. The boy, looking up, saw tears in his father's eyes.

"Father," he said, "why are you crying?"

"Don't be afraid, darling," was the reply; "I am crying because I am so happy."

It was new to the boy to learn that there were tears of joy, and he looked somewhat doubtfully; but he was soon convinced of the truth of what his father said by seeing smiles upon a face which for a long time had only worn looks of sorrow and gloomy frowns.

"Oh! I'm so glad," he said, and clapped his little hands.

A great victory had been won; but the strife was not yet over. The cravings for drink are not easily stifled. Matthew Gray felt the direful sinking which follows the use and sudden abandonment of alcohol, and thought he was dying.

"Jane," he said to his wife, when she brought his dinner upstairs, "I'm dreadfully low. I think I ought to leave it off gradually."

"No, no," she said—"no more drink. Eat your dinner; it will do you more good."

"Turn the key," he said, with a resolution hitherto foreign to him. Jane did so, and he sat down to his meal.

At first he felt as if he could not touch it; but his wife pressed him to eat a little against his will. He did so. Appetite came, and he ate a good meal.

He went out for a walk that evening with his wife and children, and whenever they approached a public-house his face told of the struggle within; but Jane whispered in his ear, "Turn the key," and they went on. He returned home without having fallen into the clutches of his old enemy.

The next morning Jane, ever watchful, was awake and up early, and having put the house to rights, so as to be ready to aid him in what she knew would be another great struggle, aroused Matthew, who awoke and