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## THE CONTRAST.

It was a night of bitter cold. "Mother," said an interesting little boy, "let me sit a little closer to you," as he moved his little stool up by his mother's side, "and don't let father whip me when he comes home. I am afraid of him—he knocks me around so. Did father always beat my little brother before he died, as he beats me?" "No my child," said the mother, "not always."

"Then why did my little brother die so soon and so suddenly?"

"I cannot tell you now, my child; you must not ask me such questions. Your father will soon be here, it may be, and he will be angry if he finds out that we are talking of your little brother that is now dead and gone."

An unconscious and sleeping infant lay upon the lap of its mother—two little boys were nestling together in a disturbed slumber upon a pallet of straw in one corner of the room, covered by the remnant of a worn out carpet. The fire was almost out upon the hearth; and the pale and sickly mother, with her anxious boy, sat waiting the approach of one, whose very foot-fall was a note of terror. The room was scantily furnished with the meanest furniture, which is found in the meanest hovel, and that hovel, the hovel of the drunkard. The city clock had tolled away the hour of mid-night, and still he did not come.

"Will he come soon, mother?"

"It may be; I cannot tell."

"I wish he would never come again; or, I wish I had no father."

"Why do you say so, my son. He is your father; and the Bible says, 'Honour thy father and mother.' Why do you wish you had no father? Do you wish your father dead?"

"No, mother; but I sometimes wish that I was dead. If it were not for you and my little brothers and sister here, I should not wish to live. I am tired of life. But when I see the tears stealing down your pale cheek, and when I think how lonely you would be on these lonely nights, if you had no little boy to sit up with you, then I wish to live for your sake, mother."

At that moment they heard the heavy tread of one who was approaching the door. There was no mistaking it; it was the step of the reeling drunkard. The boy instantly clung more closely to his mother's side, as his brutal father lifted the latch of the door.

The man who entered was of tall and well made stature, about middle life.

He was the son of wealthy parents, and had been brought up in the midst of luxury. He had been well educated for a man of business, and at his father's death had inherited an ample fortune. It was intended that he should take his father's place in the business, which he had pursued. He married early a young lady every way his equal; and no married couple ever began life together with better prospects.

But that husband had learned in early life to tarry long at the wine. He was fond of social and convivial parties. They were often at his house; and he often in the midst of them, gathered at the houses of others. There he became the frequenter of the evening wine club. He sank lower and lower by regular and constant gradations, till his property was wasted, and every thing about him was entangled. Piece after piece of his property went to satisfy the demands that crowded thickly upon him. The more his affairs became embarrassed, the more deeply did he seek to drown his sensibilities and his conscience in the intoxicating bowl. Often would his fond wife remonstrate with him, and beg him, for her sake and his children, to quit his cups and companions once and forever; and often did he, with many tears, promise that he would never drink another drop, and never again enter

that den of iniquity, the grog-shop. But long since every promise of this nature had been broken and forgotten, and he, who was the kind father, had become the infuriated fiend. Even the tears of his wife, and the fears of his children, maddened him with rage. Nothing at home would please him, but all went wrong. The more guilty he was himself, the more inclined was he to be angry with every one of his household. So it was on the night in question, and such was the mood in which he entered his miserable dwelling.

The first objects which met his eye were the tears of his wife, and the clinging of his boy to the side of his mother. He was just full enough of drink to be the demon without the imbecility of the drunkard.

"D—n you, you sneaking, slinking mercenary," said he, as he approached as with a lion bound, and seized upon his trembling boy; "I'll teach you to be always flying from the face of your father. What are you doing, you infernal rascal, to be always hiding behind your mother when I come? There, take that—and that—and that," as he cuffed him on one side of the head, and then on the other, till with the last blow, he relinquished his hold and sent him reeling against the opposite wall, where he fell, and lay groaning and manning upon the floor.

The poor mother had raised her imploring eyes to her husband to spare her boy, while the big tears were rolling down her cheek, though she could not utter a syllable.

Those tears maddened him. "Wife," said he, with the voice of a fiend, "I have seen enough of this everlasting snivelling, and now, d—n you, you shall go after your boy!" and he levelled at her a blow which laid her prostrate upon the floor. "And now," said the fiend, "I'll have a general clearance, and a still house for once." So saying, he laid hold of his wife, and dragging her to the door, he threw her into the deep snow; then seizing the infant, which had fallen to the floor, by one arm, he hurled that after her; then his almost unconscious boy, after giving him a cuff or two, he dragged by one leg to the door, and slung him, with all his might, into the dark distance without; then followed in a moment, one after the other, the little boys in the corner; roused in a twinkling, and hurled abroad upon the cold snow. Thus the house was cleared; and the moment this was done, the door was fastened, and all within was clear. The poor mother, as soon as possible, gathered around her, her out-cast family; the infant in her bosom; the little boys clinging to her on either side. But when she went to her darling first-born, the noble boy, that would never leave his mother's side, nor close an eye in sleep while she sat waiting the return of her brutal husband, she found him still unconscious, and unable to rise. With one arm, kneeling, she clasped her dying boy, and raised him to her bosom; she called him by name but he awoke not. The pulse was still beating, and that was all.

Something must be done to save her own life, and that of her children. She approached the door, from which she had been so forcibly ejected, not to seek an entrance, but to know if any deed of self-destruction might be going on within. Her spirit was broken, and she did not seek to go farther; and then she turned away to her nearest neighbour. She and her children were housed for the night, and every thing done for their relief.

Morning came and with it returning reason to the brutal father and husband. He remembered something of the scenes of the past night. But he remembered them with pain and dismay.—Where are his wife and children? tossed out in the unmerciful night! What had his cruel blows done, bestowed in the heat of madness and passion; and bestowed with what violence and force he could not remember.