

THE CANADA TEMPERANCE ADVOCATE,

DEVOTED TO

TEMPERANCE, EDUCATION, AGRICULTURE AND NEWS.

VOL. X.

MAY 1, 1844.

No. 9.

The Groggery on Salisbury Plain.

CHAPTER I.

Poverty and Temptation.—By the side of one of those numerous roads which intersect each other like veins of marble, and cross in every direction the vast tract of country comprised under the name of Salisbury Plain, there still stands, as there stood in the year 1773, the date of this true story, a small, low pothouse, apparently less especially designed for the accommodation of decent people, than those whom Sterne describes as unfortunate travellers; men whose own feet constitute the only means of transition from place to place with which fortune has favored them; and whose own backs, in like manner, are the only backs in the world which they enjoy the privilege of loading with a mortal burden.

One warm evening in July of the above-mentioned year, a man named Jacob Fearn might have been seen sitting on a block of granite brought from Stonehenge, by way of a chair, at the door of that identical house, smoking a short and dirty pipe, which for the sake of economy he had begged of the landlord, and sipping a pot of brown ale, for which he had expended the last few halfpence in the world that he could call his own.

Jacob was a native of Salisbury, where he resided in utter obscurity with his aged mother, and a sister of eighteen—a sensible, handsome creature, whom Jacob much loved,—and upon the exertions of whom, in various feminine employments he now temporarily depended for the barest means of subsistence: he himself being, at the time we speak of, unable to obtain any employment whereby to win the bread of life.

When a man has descended so far down the steep of poverty that it is well nigh impossible he can sink any lower, he commonly sits down as it were at the bottom of the hill, and looks upwards upon all the world above him with any eye of envy and hatred, as though ever meditating ill. And thus it was with poor Jacob. The liquid representative of his last penny was fast evaporating from before him, while there he sat in the very recklessness of despair, ragged, self abandoned, and ferocious,—a strong man, whose strength was useless on the earth—a figure which nature had cast in one of her fairest proportioned moulds, made gaunt and angular and grim by lack of sufficient sustenance from year to year; and presenting that most painful of sights which civilized society can offer—power without utility, capabilities perverted to evil ends—a human being apparently disregarded by himself, and uncared for by any other human being in the world.

And as Jacob sat thus, looking silently on the road that lay before the public house door, he saw the team-driver; by whistling in the happiness of employment and plenty, and envied him; he thought it was better to work even for nothing, than for a man to sit idle until he felt himself a mere excrescence on society, and fit only to be lopped away. And then the lordly carriage rolled by, whirling to new scenes people who sat in them seemingly as idle and, it might possibly be, no more deserving than himself; while behind, perhaps, appeared some plump-fed, well-clothed footman, or lackadaisical lady's maid: people who in Jacob's opinion, made idleness a business itself, and who throve much better upon it than nineteen-twentieths of those whose worthy business it was to supply with unceas-

ing labor all the wants and necessities of mankind. And out of all this he drew reflections which we shall not repeat, but which rendered uneasiness still more uneasy, and dissatisfaction doubly dissatisfied.

By and by, a foot-soldier, with a small bundle slung at the end of a stick, and carried across his shoulder, came up to the door. Heated by the sun, his face was scarcely less red than his jacket; and his feet were thickly covered with the dust of summer travel.

"Well comrade; he exclaimed, espying Jacob, and making a full stop, as he wiped the hot drops of moisture from his forehead—the world and you seem to agree very well together."

"True, true!" replied Jacob—"we can't quarrel, because we hold no dealings with each other. I sit idle while all the world does all the work;—she won't let me have a bit of it."

"Nor a bit of the profits either, I suppose," replied the other, with a sarcastic glance at Jacob's miserable figure, which secretly turned the idle man's heart into bitterness.

"No, nor the profits either," replied Jacob.

"Then turn soldier, man!" added he in the red jacket, "it's worth twenty ragged lives like yours. You'll live well, save a little money, and get a holiday now and then, to go and see your sweetheart, if you have one, as I do."

"Oh! you are on furlough, are you?" asked Jacob—an inquiry to which his companion gave answer in the affirmative; and, during their subsequent conversation, the soldier furthermore informed him, that about three years previously he had been quartered in Salisbury, where he fell in love with a young creature of fifteen, that he had responded with her in the mean time unknown to her friends and that he was determined now to marry her; for the purpose of arranging the preliminaries to which important ceremony he was now on a visit to her, carrying nearly fifty pounds in his pocket, which he had contrived to save during the period of his service in the army.

Fifty pounds! That revelation was fatal to poor Jacob.

Actuated by those feelings of generosity which commonly inhabit young bosoms, the happy young soldier invited Jacob to share his can throughout the evening; and as conversation induced drink, and drink yet more conversation, the twain sat at the table until late in the cool of night, when they both set out together, not in a state of the greatest sobriety, on their way to Salisbury.

Quarrelsome as some individuals are rendered by being under the influence of drink, with others again its effect is directly to the contrary; and not unfrequently may two persons so situated be observed rolling home in company, now rubbing their shoulders forcibly together, and anon flying at a tangent three or four yards apart, yet all the time vowing deep affection, friendship, and service to each other; by the next dawn of light, perhaps to forget it all, or to remember only with an unpleasant sense of foolishness and shame.

How the two characters of our story sped in this particular, the reader may judge for himself—be it enough for us to say,—

It so fell out that Jacob Fearn did not reach his home