

"He has been threatenin' this for some time, but I never thocht he would do't. But I ken when he takes onything fairly into his head he is desperate determined."

"How are you to live?"

"The Lord Himself kens, We have naething in the world to buy food wi'—that's the last meal in the hoose," pointing to the porridge the children were eating.

"And what think ye o' this blackguard, noo, that could do sic a thing?" said the old woman, rather bitterly, looking towards me.

"He's not a blackguard, and never was a blackguard! You're my mither, but speakna that way o' John Gerry! The fear o' God was aye in his heart, and if you and me were baith pittan into the scales, we wouldna weigh a feather against him. He has been mair sinn'd against than sinnin'! He's aye been a kind man to me!"

When Nelly said this, I never saw her look so grand and beautiful. She seemed to me, as she spoke, to become a foot taller, her features kindled with indignation, her voice assumed a high and scornful tone; then the wave of womanly feeling that had swelled up so proudly within her, overflowed in tears. And now a true wife seemed to be standing before me. The old woman was silent.

I saw that, in the circumstances, there was only one thing to be done. An application must be made forthwith to the parochial board for a weekly allowance for this destitute and helpless family. Mrs. Gerry might be able to earn a little, but she could not support both herself and the children. Administering in the meantime what relief I could, I returned home with a heavy heart, as I have often done after pursuing my missionary labors among the poor and needy, the friendless and forlorn, of the great city. On entering my lodging, I found a note on the table, enclosed in an envelope and carefully sealed, which I literally transcribe:—

"REVERENT SIR,—

"I can endure this life no longer, and maun flee for comfort. I dinna ken if ever I will find it. Please, sir, to vesisit my wif Nelly and my bairns, Tammy, Mary, Maggy and Ailie, as often as you can. God bless them a', and may He forgive the cause o' this. Pray, good sir, for them, and for your distressed servant,

"JOHN GERRY."

This brief, sad and ominous note sent a cold shiver through my heart. It seemed to me the last earthly sigh of a sensitive spirit driven to despair. The only meaning I could extract out of it was, that the brain of this poor anguished man was cracking, and that he had gone to commit suicide. I knew that John Gerry was a man of deep religious convictions, in which there never appeared any tincture of fanaticism, and I always believed that these would save him from any extreme of badness and impiety. On all the subjects about which he could reason,—and they were not a few for a person of his education and

opportunities,—he exhibited a strong discerning mind, and a sound and healthy heart. Yet his temperament was keen and nervous, and he was endowed with deep sensibilities. If such a nature as his were severely strained, might not the tortured and trembling cords of that mysterious life which is deeper than the flesh, be broken asunder? William Cowper, the poet, was a pious and godly man, yet, in a fit of mental aberration, he several times tried to destroy himself. Hugh Miller had a vigorous intellect and strong religious faith, yet sudden darkness rolled over that shining soul, and—the rest is known. Of what avail are a good compass and a sound rudder to a vessel whose solid ribs have been torn agape by the assaulting billows? That brief note of poor John Gerry brought a horror upon me so that I could not sleep that night, and the following day I actually took a look into several of the police stations in town, half expecting to see there the dead body of the missing man. But I saw no sign of that which I looked for. I resolved not to shew this note to Mrs. Gerry, nor to say anything at all to her suggestive of the suspicion I harboured. After all, the man might be alive, might soon "come to himself" when his thoughts reverted to the home he had deserted, and to the hearts that were breaking for him there. I resolved to call frequently at the house, and impart to the distressed and helpless woman and her family all the comfort and consolation within my power. The day after I received the note, I visited the family, and found an elderly and gentlemanly-looking man sitting in the midst of them. "This is an uncle o' John's, a shop-keeper in town—Mr. Blair," said Mrs. Gerry. "I have to thank you, Mr. —," interposed the gentleman, "for your attention to this family. I was sorry to learn, this morning, from Mrs. Gerry, that her husband, my nephew, has thought it necessary to take the strange step he has done."

"He is a different man from what I took him to be, if he has really absconded and left his wife and children to starve."

"Well," replied Mr. Blair, "it cannot be helped in the meantime. I was telling Ellen what I proposed to do."

"I have been to the office of the Parochial Board," I replied, "and have —"

Here the old gentleman's face colored. "You are very kind, sir," he said, "but John's family shall not need, while I am living, to become public paupers. God forbid that I should sit as a member of that Board and witness such a thing. Mrs. Gerry's mother had better return home and do the best she can for herself as formerly, and I shall supply the wants of the family in the meantime. Tammy will come into my shop—if he has no objection,—as a young apprentice, and live in my house; and, if he be a good boy, I'll make a man of him."

"Please, sir," observed Mrs. Gerry, in a