

## THE BURNISH FAMILY.

## CHAPTER V.

What a Heretic thought of Philanthropy and Religion as Burnish.

A PRIZE STORY PUBLISHED BY THE SCOTTISH TEMPERANCE LEAGUE.

## CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

"My medical prescription, or as a matter of individual taste, may I ask, Miss Alterton?" said Mr. Burnish the second Sunday of her residence.

"Neither, sir," said Mabel, blushing deeply at finding herself the subject of remark, and seeing a little sneer rippling on the lips of the bland Mr. Veering, as he raised his glass ostentatiously to his lips with an air of offended virtue.

"Neither! how so? you speak riddles, Miss Alterton," reiterated Mr. Burnish.

"I have a principle against it, sir! It appears to me, there is so much misery produced by the drinking customs of society, that I wish to have nothing to do with them," replied Mabel, with a slight tremor in her voice, but a clear light beaming in her eyes.

Shafton Keen, who dined there every Sunday, set his glass down, evidently highly amused, and looked at his uncle: that worthy gentleman's face being just then a puzzle. It was beneath his dignity to be angry, and yet the speech of Mabel, though softly spoken, did not please him.

"My dear Miss Alterton," he said, in a constrained tone, and with a severe flash in his stern eyes, "the evils of this world are not cured by eccentricities. If all the young ladies fresh from school, with the great knowledge of human nature they must possess, were to leave off their wine from this day, depend on it, there would still be drunkenness, notwithstanding their heroic sacrifice of the courtesies of good society, and the laws of common sense."

Mr. Veering laughed out as much as he could, for a good hearty laugh was not in him, at this sally; and the boys, who liked their daily glass of wine, joined in a little sniggering chorus, at which, however, Mr. Burnish looked round angrily. Mr. Veering instantly resumed his gravity, and the head of the house added, "But in my house, and at my table, no one is coerced. Pursue your own plan, Miss Alterton; but, remember, if you think it likely to do good, I venture to tell you you are mistaken."

"Perhaps so, sir," said Mabel gently; "but I thought that ail were answerable for acting up to conviction."

"They should educate their convictions, and see that they are on the winning side," interposed Mr. Shafton Keen, in his quiet voice, that cleaved its way like a razor through the other tones.

"The right side, you would say, my dear sir," remarked Mr. Veering, correcting the sentence.

"No, sir," rejoined Shafton Keen, carelessly, "I meant what I said, 'the winning side.'"

"Shafton makes a jest of everything," said Mrs. Burnish peevishly; "and I must say, for my part, I have no sympathy with these new ideas about our duty to drunkards. We shall cure you of these fancies, dear Miss Alterton. Why, only a short time back, we had to discharge our two Scripture-readers, for they actually substituted, that is, they added, some tracts about some nonsense they called Total Abstinence, to our authorized tracts and the blessed gospel. Mr. Veering knows that, in future, no such enthusiasts are to be employed."

"I shall feel it my duty to be very careful," said Mr. Veering.

"Be equally careful, sir," said Delamere Burnish, "that you employ sober men, for I remember—"

"Oh! that's an old story," interrupted Mr. Burnish, evidently wishing none of Delamere's recollections to be repeated. "Of course, we shall employ sober men; but my conscience would never permit me to employ men whose Pharisaical morality was always brought forward, and who were planning works of human device, instead of trusting to faith and grace to operate a change on the human heart. 'Shafton,' he added, peevishly, as he caught the expression that lurked in his nephew's eye, "I beg of you to be serious. I happen, sir, to have a conscience, and to respect its admonitions. I recommend you, young men," looking at Delamere as well, and speaking pompously, "to attend to its inward voice."

Mrs. Burnish, rather flustered, yet enjoying the warmth of her husband's manner, rose to leave the table, Miss Alterton and the little girls following. Mabel heard the distinct tones of Shafton Keen, as she passed, say, in a whisper to his cousin, "Ah! Delamere, it's no wonder the commander-in-chief has such a formidable conscience. Why, man, it's as deep as a vat, and as broad as the acres covered by the Burnish brewery." Mabel saw Delamere impatiently or indignantly trying to hush the satirist, and Mr. Veering was putting forward his face, which very much resembled a watchful tom-cat, with the evident desire of hearing the remark—doubtless to improve it in the repetition to Mrs. Burnish.

"During that evening, Mabel's reflections were mostly on the difficult question of Conscience, and the difference there was in the quality of that article.

Through tattered clothes small vices do appear;  
Robes and furred gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,  
And the strong lance of justice hurtles breaks.  
Arm it in rags—a pigmy's straw doth pierce it.

Shakespeare.

"That's an oddity, Delamere, that Miss Alterton," said Mr. Shafton Keen, as he sauntered in the evening towards his lodgings, in the New Road, accompanied by his cousin, who liked to visit the bachelor quarters of the young surgeon, and indulge, without fear of interruption, in the smoking and potatoes common to a house where several medical students boarded.

"I see nothing so odd," replied Delamere. "She must think us odd; quite barbarians, I fancy! Why, it was a complete attack on her to-day at table."

"Oh! it was capital. I wouldn't have missed that brief scene on any account. My respected uncle's perplexity at finding in his own house some one with a conscience different from his. Because you know, my dear fellow, that all consciences are regulated, or ought to be, by the Burnish barometer, and that neither you nor I, when in our good behavior, are up to the right mark. Now, to see that young girl, with her calm face, so quietly cutting prejudice against the grain, and talking of her convictions about drunkenness, in a house that has as surely grown to its goodly dimensions out of the intemperance of the people—manned by drunkards' blood, and bones, and vitals—as a tree grows out of the earth."

"Faugh! Shafton, how odious are your similes—they smell of the dissecting room, man! and as to the trade, what have we to do with that? No one forces the national throat to gulp down the Burnish porter. The excess rests with the consumers and the—"

"The cash, Delamere, with you," laughed Shafton.

"Well! and if so, without boasting, Shafton, there's no stint of the 'cash,' as you call it, when the claims of religion and benevolence are made."

"Now, don't, my good fellow—now, pray, don't say one word on those well-worn topics. I hate the very names! It's not your trade—and be thankful that it is not—to emulate Mr. Veering, and make the worst appear the better cause. My good aunt may call me latitudinarian, heterodox, free-thinker, or whatever name her vocabulary of denunciation supplies; but, if I called myself Christian minister, I'd pluck my tongue out, before it should gloze and fawn over rich sinners, and see, with a microscopic glance, the vices of the poor. Trust me, Delamere, it's not a fault confined to the Israelites of old to fall down and worship the golden calf."

"Upon my word, Shafton, you improve; who is it, my father or uncle Felix, that your worshipful self calls a golden calf? Get rid of this splenetic humor: it does not sit well upon you."

"All in good part, coz! I speak what I think to you. Though, I must say, you surprise me. I never thought you would prove such a true twig of the family tree. I see you mean to blazon forth in the golden sunshine, heedless of the manure I spoke of at your roots. Yes! you'll be earning some thousands by breaking society's head, and then magnanimously, you'll give a few shillings back to buy a plaster, knocking down with the strong blow of an armed right hand, and ostentatiously trying to lift up with the tip of a little finger. Pharisees, indeed! Oh, it's rich to hear my uncle talk of a Pharisaical morality! Meanwhile, that young girl tells them of convictions that include self—a morality whose glance is inward, and begins with the individual. Mark me, she'll have to alter all that, or leave."

"By the way," he added, after a pause, "where did she spring from—this *rara avis*? If I mistake not, my good coz, you have spent your evenings at home more regularly of late, and I suspect this Miss Alterton is the cause; have a care! the heir of what Dr. Johnson called the "potentiality of becoming rich beyond the dreams of avarice," must never descend from his dignity as surveyor of blessings to the community, by wedding a portionless governess."

"What folly you utter, Shafton; but, as my mother says—"It's only Shafton." Surely I may be civil to a young lady in my father's house, without such results as you suppose. Besides, the reserve of Miss Alterton is a peculiarity so marked, that it piques my curiosity. I fancy she must have something to conceal."

"It's a fact that has a story to tell, if one could only read it," said Shafton; "an orphan who has had reverses."

"I think not an orphan. I have heard Mrs. Burnish say her father is living, and in the wine trade. I saw Miss Alterton in a railway carriage a month before she came to us. She was not then in mourning; but what surprised me was the appearance of the woman who met her at the station. A low Londoner, as regularly steeped in gin as any specimen of the class I have ever seen."

"Oh! as to that, no one is answerable for the people they employ in his great city," said Shafton. "One thing I feel certain of, my good aunt,