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THE TWO PLEDGES.

BY NAHUM FAITHFUL.

(Continued.)

Archie Gray was known all the country round as a reformed man. He was pointed to as one of the brightest trophies of the temperance movement, and as a great living argument in favour of its principles. He had himself oftentimes lifted up his voice in public in testimony of "the wondrous change" that had come over him, through the adoption of the simple principles of abstinence. No wonder, then, that the news of his fall were carried on the wings of the wind, and spread like wildfire amongst the little villages and rural cots of his native shire. It spread sadness over the faces of some, made others grow faint-hearted and feeble in the good work, and afforded a theme of wicked exultation to the enemies of the cause.

There was one sufferer through the fatal step, over whose bitter endurance of lonely woe angels might have wept. After unnumbered weary nights of solitary weeping, she had just emerged into the sunshine of hope and joy, and had lifted a cup brimsful of earthly happiness to her lip, when it was again dashed to the earth with rude and reckless hands. It sent the blight across her noble yet gentle spirit, like as the mildew on the gale passes over some sunny land of flowers, leaving nought behind it save faded and dying forms. Hitherto she had struggled with womanly magnanimity unall her misfortunes, but now the weight of woe came so heavily and so crushingly upon her, and that, too, at a time when her spirits had just been lightened from a weary load, that she was fain to lie down beneath it, and close her eyes for ever on life's troubled and chequered scenes. That was the noble minded Mary Gray. She would say to herself "what could I not have endured with my Archie at my side? I could have entered with him into the darkening cloud of adversity without a murmur—I could have braved the scowl of the oppressor or the cold neglect of the world—

I could have sought a home in a strange land—I could even have begged my bread with him from door to door, had he only preserved the character and bearing of a man; but to see him degraded once more—the slave of the vilest appetite, sunk lower than the brutes, an outcast from society, my own once manly Archie—I cannot bear it; would that I could die this very night!" Then would she weep till she wept herself asleep, and in her dream she would weep still. In the short space of a few weeks the bloom had faded from Mary's cheeks; her lovelit eye had become sunken and dim; corroding vexation had ploughed deep furrows on her brow, and her frame had become so attenuated, and her step so feeble, that those who knew her could not help saying "Poor woman, she looks like a heart-broken thing, and will soon be ready for her winding-sheet." They judged rightly; the worm was already preying on her vitals, the lamp of life already flickering to its close.

Mary Gray had born two children to her erring husband; sweet little prattlers were they, and they looked innocent and beautiful as the young opening flowers on a summer's morning; but their existence only added another drop of gall to Mary's cup of wretchedness. Strange and unhalloved reversion that must be, that turns the sources of life's purest joys into sources of deepest and most bitter sorrow. But she was not to blame for it. Yet so it was, and oft has been. As she hugged her jewels to her breast, and gazed on their sweet countenances, "so passionless, so pure," and then looked forward to the unmitigated gloom that hang around their prospects, she felt as if her reason would leave her, or her heart break upon the spot. She felt that she could not part with her darling infants, and leave them homeless strangers on the world's wild waste. Can woman's gentle spirit be rent asunder by a pang of keener anguish than this?

But what had come of Archie, and how fared it with that ill-fated man, now that many weeks had elapsed since he fell? He was again the companion of the dissolute and the vile; the walls of the Black Bull once more rang with his frantic mirth while he had a farthing to pay down for the Circean draught, and he visited not his own home save when compelled by absolute want so to do. And yet when he did go home, no reproach broke upon his ear. There, by the side of a few dying embers, sat his drooping wife and hungry children; but though he was the cause of their misfortunes and their sufferings, they reviled him not, but endured in uncomplaining meekness all their wrongs. This was what Archie Gray could not bear. He could have braved a storm of harsh epithets and hard words; but the mute endurance of unmerited and terrible injury, by her whom he had sworn at the altar to protect and love, drove the iron deep into his soul; for, withal, under Archie Gray's manly form there lived a noble, though an erring heart. And one glance at the faded forms, and tearful eyes of his wife and children, made all his generous nature rise in rebellion against himself. On one occasion he fled from the house. He chid himself in words of most cutting accusation. He thought himself the blackest criminal on whom the light of day ever shone. He could not look upon the sun, for he thought its pure and piercing beams entered the polluted chambers of his soul, to