WITHOUT A HOME.

By Edward P. Roe, Author of "Barriers Burned Away," "Opening a Chestnut Burr," "Success with Small Fruits," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.—*Continued.*

The room in the Inquisition, whose circular walls, studded with long, sharp spikes, and which gradually closed upon and pierced the victim, had its spiritual counterpart in his present condition. He was shut in on every side. If he made a push for liberty by abstaining from the drug, he was met and driven back by many nameless agonies. He seemed to recoil, inevitably, as if from steel barbs. Meanwhile the walls were closing in upon him. In order to prevent life from being a continuous burden, in order to maintain even the semblance of strength and manhood, so that he might have some chance of finding employment, he had to increase the quantity of morphia daily; but each succeeding indulgence brought nearer the hour when the drug would produce pain—pain only and death. After a week or two of futile and spasmodic effort he drifted on in the old way, occasionally suffering untold agony in remorse and self-loathing, but stifling conscience, memory and reason as far as possible by continuous stimulation.

His quest of employment was naturally unsuccessful. The South was impoverished. Weak from the wounds of war and the deeper enervation of a system that had poisoned her life for generations, she had not yet begun to rally. There was not enough business in the city for the slow and nerveless hands of its citizens, therefore there was little prospect for a newcomer, unless he had the capital and energy to create activity in the midst of stagnation. A few were slightly imposed upon at first by Mr. Jocelyn's exalted moods, and believed that he might do great things if he were given the chance; but they soon recognized that he was unsound and visionary, broaching plans and projects that varied widely with each succeeding interview. The greater number of his former friends and acquaintances were scattered or dead, and those who remembered him had their hands too full to do more than say a good word for him—saying it, too, more and more faintly as they saw how broken and untrustworthy he was. The story of his behavior on the ship, and correct surmises of the true cause of his manner and appearance, soon became current in business circles, and the half-pitying, half-contemptuous manner of those with whom he came in contact at last made it clear, even to his clouded mind, that further effort was utterly useless.

Meanwhile his habit now began to inflict a punishment that often seemed beyond endurance. The increased quantities of morphia with which he sought to sustain himself, combined with his anxiety, remorse, and solicitude for his family and his own future, filled the hours of darkness with one long nightmare of horror. His half-sleeping visions were more vivid and real than the scenes of day. From some harrowing illusion he would start up with a groan or cry, only to relapse a few moments later into an apparent situation more appalling and desperate.

The earth would open and swallow him in fathomless darkness; then he was on a ship caught in a maelstrom and whirled down with a speed imaginable only by a mind as disordered and morbid as his own. Panting, struggling, drenched with a cold perspiration, he would struggle back into a brief and miserable consciousness. With scarcely any respite his diseased imagination would seize him again, and now the ship, with tattered sails and broken masts, would be becalmed in the centre of a cyclone. All around him was the whirling tornado from which the vessel had passed into awful silence and deceptive peace. Although viewless, a resistless volume was circling round him, a revolving torrent of air that might at any second make its existence known by wrenching the ship in some direction with such violence as to destroy it at once. When would the awful suspense be over, and the cyclone, with a peal of thunder through the rigging, again lay its frenzied grasp on the ill-fated ship? In unspeakable dread he seemed to spring from the deck in the hope of ending all, and would find himself gasping on his couch, which vice had made a place of torture not rest.

But the visions which most shook his soul were these connected with his wife and children. He saw them staring; he saw them turned into the street, mocked and gibed at by every passer-by. He saw them locked up in prison-cells, under the charge of jailors that were half brute, half fiend; he saw Fred and Minnie carried off by an Italian padrone to a den reeking with filth, and loud with oaths and obscenity. With a hoarse shout of rage he sprang up to avert blows that were bruising their little forms; he saw his wife turn her despairing eyes from heaven and curse the hour of their union; he saw Mildred, writhing and resisting, dragged from her home by great dark hands that were claws rather than hands; worse than all, he saw Belle, dressed in colors that seemed woven from stains of blood, stealing out under the cover of night with eyes like livid coals.

Such are the beatific visions that opium bestows, having once enchained its victim. Little wonder that, after spending nights upon a poisoned rack, Mr. Jocelyn was in no condition to meet his fellow-men and win their confidence.

The dark thought crossed his mind more than once that he had better never return home—that, since he had lost his manhood, life had better go too; but in these darkest and most desperate moments the face of his wife would rise before him, and from her white lips came the cry, "No! no! no!" with such agonized intensity that he was restrained.

Moreover, he had not given up hope altogether, and he determined to return, and, unknown to his family, consult his old physician, who had inadvertently led him into this terrible dilemma, and adjure him to undo his work. He might aid him in concealing the truth from those of whom, of all others, he would hide his shame. This seemed his one last chance.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SECRET VICE REVEALED.

On the day preceding Christmas, late in the afternoon, Roger Atwood boarded a steamer which had just arrived from a southern city. His uncle, the commission merchant, was expecting a consignment of tropical fruits, and as the young man stood among others waiting to see the freight clerk, he overheard one of the vessel's officers remark, "His name is Jocelyn—so papers on his person indicate—and he must be sent to a hospital as soon as possible."

Advancing promptly to the speaker, Roger said, "I overheard your remark, sir, and think I know the gentlemen to whom you refer. If I am right, I will take him to his family immediately."

The officer acted with such alacrity as to prove thet he was very glad to get the sick man off his hands, and Roger noted the fact. A moment later he saw Martin Jocelyn, sadly changed for the worse, and lying unconscious in a berth.

"I am right, I am very sorry to say," Roger said, after a moment, with a long deep breath. "This will be a terrible shock to his family."

"Do you think he is dying?" the officer asked

"I don't know. I will bring a physician and take Mr. Jocelyn home on one condition—that our consignment of produce is delivered at once. I must be absent, and my employer's interests must not suffer in consequence. I am doing you a favor, and you must return it just as promptly."

The freight clerk was summoned and Roger assured that his uncle's consignment should take the precedence as fast as it could be reached. The young man then hastened to find the nearest physician, stopping a moment at his place of business to give a hurried explanation of his course. Mr. Atwood listened in silence, and nodded merely; but, as Roger hastened away, he muttered, "This mixing himself up with other people's troubles isn't very shrewd, but his making capital out of it so that my consignment will all be delivered to-night is—well, we'll call it even. He's no fool."

The physician was rather young and inexperienced, and he pronounced Mr. Jocelyn's trouble to be congestion of the brain. He agreed to go with Roger to the old mansion and do what he could for the patient, although holding out slight hope of recovery.

"She is learning to associate me with misfortune, and will dread my presence as if I were a bird of ill-omen," Roger groaned mentally, as he recalled the several miserable occasions which, in the mind of Mildred, were inseparably connected with himself; "but some day—*some day*, if I have to strive for a lifetime—she shall also learn that it is not I who brings the trouble."

Christmas comes at the darkest and dreariest season of the year, making short, cold days, and longer, colder nights the holiday season, just as He, whose birth the day commemorates, comes to human hearts in the darkest and coldest hours of desolation. Even in the great city they were hallowed time. The old mansion, that once may have been embowered in evergreens, was again filled with the aromatic breath of the forest, for Roger had commissioned a friend in the country to send so large a supply to Belle that she was embarrassed with riches of hemlock, laural and pine, which, although given away prodically, left enough to transform their rooms into the aspect of bowers. Since they had not money for toys, they could make the Christmas-tide a time of wonder and delight to Fred and Minnie in this inexpensive way, and Mildred, who would naturally shrink from the wild mountain home of the evergreen boughs, found in weaving and arranging them into tasteful decorations a pleasure alloyed by only one thought—she was indebted for it to Roger Atwood, the silent yet determined rival of the man she loved. Though he buried his feeling in such profound silence, and hid all manifestation so carefully that even her intuition could not lay hold of any one thing, and say, "This proves it," she nevertheless felt the presence of his love, and sometimes thought she felt it all the more because of its strong repression. It almost vexed her that he made no advances and gave her nothing to resent while all the time he was seeking her with the whole force of his will, or at least waiting for some possibility of the future. When Belle proposed that he should help decorate their living room, since they at this season had only remnants of evenings to give and were wearied too, almost beyond the power for extra effort, she felt that for Belle's sake she ought not to object, and that for her own sake she could not, so scrupulous had been the quiet, distant respect with which he had treated her. When he came he seemed to anticipate her thoughts and to obey her wishes in the arrangement of the greenery, even before she spoke so keen was his observation and quick his sympathy with her mind.

These very facts increased her prejudice and dislike. He was too clever, too keen-sighted and appreciative. Had he been indifferent toward her, and not so observant, she would have soon learned to like him and enjoy his society, for he had a bright, piquant way of talking, and was seldom at a loss for words. In fact, he had plenty of ideas, and was gaining more. One reason why Mildred shrank from him in strengthening repulsion was because, in his absorbing interest and his quick comprehension of her thought and feeling, he came too near. Without intending it, and in spite of himself, he intruded on her woman's privacy; for no matter how careful he might be, or how guarded she was in her words or manner, she felt that he understood what was in her mind. Her natural impulse, therefore, was to shun his presence and suppress her own individuality when she could not escape him, for only an answering affection on her part could make such understanding appreciation acceptable.

Roger was not long in guessing quite accurately how he stood in her thoughts, and he was often much depressed. As he had said to Clara Bute, he had a downright dislike to contend against, and this might not change with his success. And now it was his misfortune to become associated in her mind with another painful event—perhaps a fatal one. She might thank him sincerely for his kindness and the trouble he had taken in their behalf, but all the same, deep in her heart the old aversion would be strengthened.

"That invertebrate Arnold," he muttered, "represents to her the old, happy life and it's my luck always to appear when things are at their worst. After to-night she will shudder with apprehension whenever she sees me. What will become of them if Mr. Jocelyn dies?"

Full of forebodings and distress at the shock and sorrow that was impending over those in whom he was so deeply interested, he and the physician placed Mr. Jocelyn in a covered express wagon that was improvised into an ambulance, and drove up town as rapidly as they dared.

In response to a low knock Mrs. Jocelyn opened the door, and the white, troubled face of Roger announced evil tidings before a word was spoken.

"My husband!" she gasped, siking into a chair.

The young man knelt beside her and said, "Mrs. Jocelyn, his life may depend on your courage and fortitude."

He had touched the right chord, and, after a momentary and half-convulsive sob, she rose quietly, and said, "Tell me what to do—tell me the worst."

"I have brought him with me, and I have a physician also. I found him on a steamer, by accident. They were about to send him to a hospital, but I was sure you would want him brought home."

"Oh, yes—God bless you—bring him, bring him quick."

"Courage. Good nursing will prevent the worst."

Roger hastened back to the patient, stopping on the way only long enough to ask Mrs. Wheaton to go to Mr. Jocelyn's room instantly, and then, with the physician's aid, he carried the unconscious man to his room, and laid him on his bed.

"Oh, Martin! Martin!" moaned the wife, "how changed, how changed! Oh, God! he's dying."

"I hope not, madam," said the physician; "at any rate we must all keep our self-possession and do our best. While there is life there is hope."

With dilated eyes, and almost fierce repression of all aid from other hands, she took the clothing from the limp and wasted form.

"He *is* dying," she moanec; see how unnatural his eyes are; the pupils are almost gone. Oh, God! why did I let him go from me when he was so ill."

"Would you not like Belle and Miss Mildred summoned at once?" Roger asked.

"Yes, yes, they ought to be here now; every moment may be precious, and he may become conscious."

"At the same time I would like you to call on Dr. Benton in Twenty-third street," added the physician. "He is a friend of mine, and has had much experience. In so serious a case I would like to consult him."

Roger, while on his way to Dr. Benton's office, passed a livery-stable with a coach standing just within the door, and he at once resolved that the weary girls should not be exhausted by flying home in terror-stricken haste. He took the carriage, obtained the physician, and explained to him what had happened while on the way to the shop in which Belle was employed. It was Christmas eve, and the store was still crowded with eleventh-hour purcharers, on whom the weary child was waiting in a jaded, mechanical way. Her vacant look and the dark lines under her eyes proved how exhausted she was; but at the sight of Roger a flash of light and pleasure came into her face, and then his expression caused it to fade into extreme pallor.

"What is it!" she asked, turning from a garrulous customer.

"Don't be alarmed; get your things and come with me. I will make it all right with your employer."

"Belle," he said, when they were by the carriage door, "you must be a brave woman to-night. Your father is home and he is very ill. Perhaps his life depends on quiet and freedom from all excitement. Dr. Benton, an experienced physician, is in the carriage and will go with us. You must tell your sister—I cannot."

If Belle had been herself she would not have failed him; but, after the long strain of the day, she became completely unnerved at his tidings, and sobbed almost hysterically. She could not control herself sufficiently to enter the shop where Mildred stood, unconscious of the approaching shadow, and so the heavy task of breaking the news fell upon Roger. "If Belle, naturally so strong, was white and faint from the long, toilsome day, how wan and ghost-like poor Mildred will appear!" was his thought as he sprang to the sidewalk.

They were closing up, and the discipline of the shop was over. Instead of pallor, there was an angry crimson in Mildred's cheeks, and an indignant fire in her eyes. She evidently was deeply incensed, and her companions apparently were as greatly amused. When she saw Roger the crimson deepened in her face, her brow knitted in strong vexation, and she went on with her task of putting the goods under her charge in order, as if she had not seen him; but the thought flashed through her mind: "Oh that he were to me what he is to Belle! Then he might punish my insolent persecutor, but he's the last one in the world to whom I can appeal. Oh, where is papa?"

"Miss Jocelyn—"

"Don't you see you have another beau?" whispered one of her companions as she passed out. "You won't treat this one with words and manner that are the same as a slap in the face, for he's too good-looking."

She paid no heed to the gibe, for the young man's tone was significant, and she had lifted her eyes to his with eager questioning. His grave, sad face banished the flush from hers instantly.

"Miss Jocelyn," Roger began again, in a low tone, "you have already learned to associate me with painful experiences. I cannot help it. But this, my misfortune, is nothing, if you must nerve yourself for anxiety that will test even your strength. Your father is home, and ill. I will not explain further before strangers. Belle and a physician are awaiting you in the carriage."

How quiet and measured were his words; but even in her distress she was painfully conscious that the slight tremor in his voice was the low vibration of a feeling whose repressed intensity would sooner or later break forth. Beyond a momentary shrinking from what seemed to her but well-mastered vehemence, she gave him no thought in her overwhelming solicitude.

Scarcely a moment elapsed before she joined him at the door. As he placed her in the carriage he said, "Dr. Benson will explain to you what has happened."

"Roger—" sobbed Belle, but he sprang on the box with the driver, and in a few moments they were at the door of the old mansion.

"Dr. Benton," said the young man, "will you please accompany Miss Jocelyn? After the fatigue of the day and the shock of this evening she will need your support," and he saw that she leaned heavily on the physician's arm.

Having dismissed the carriage, he found Belle leaning against the side of the house, faint and trembling. The young athlete lifted her in his arms and bore her steadily and easily to the doorway, and then again up the winding stairway. "Belle," he whispered, "if you lose your father you shall at least have a brother."

She entwined her arm about his neck in mute acceptance of the relationship. Her every breath was a low sob, and she could not then tell him how his words reassured her, taking away, in part, the almost overwhelming terror of being left unprotected in the world.

During Mr. Jocelyn's absence his family had tried to banish from their minds the memory of his weakness, and thus they had come to think of him again as the strong, cheerful, genial man they had known all their lives. The months preceding his departure were like a hateful dream. It had been a dearly cherished hope that, after breathing his native air for a few weeks, he would return the same frank, clear-eyed, clear-brained man that had won his way, even among strangers, after the wreck and ruin of the war. To him their thoughts had turned daily, in the hope of release from toil that was often torture, and from anxieties that filled ever waking hour with foreboding.

How bitter the disappointment then, and how terrible the shock, as they now looked upon his prostrate form, meagre, shrunken and almost lifeless! Instead of the full, dark eyes that had beamed mirthfully and lovingly for so many years, there was an unnatural contraction of the pupils which rendered them almost invisible. His once healthy complexion was now livid, or rather of a leaden, bluish hue; his respirations stertorous and singularly deliberate.

"He is dying," Mildred moaned; "he is far, far away from us even now. Oh, if we could have but one look, one sign of farewell!"

Belle and Mrs. Jocelyn became almost helpless with grief, but it did not seem possible to them that he could rally. "Oh, why did I let him go—why did I let him go!" was the wife's remorseful and oft-repeated words.

The elderly and experienced physician whom Roger had brought ignored with professional indifference the grief-stricken household, and was giving his whole mind to the study of the case. After examining the pupils of Mr. Jocelyn's eyes, taking his temperature and counting his pulse, he looked at his associate and shook his head significantly. Roger, who stood in the background, saw that Dr. Benton did not accept the young physician's diagnosis. A moment later Dr. Benton bared the patient's arm and pointed to many small scars, some old and scarcely visible, and others recent and slightly inflamed. The young practitioner then apparently understood him, for he said. "This is both worse and better than I feared."

"Worse, worse," growled Dr. Benton.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Jocelyn, more dead than alive.

"Madam," began Dr. Benton very gravely, "have you never seen your husband using a little instrument like this?" and he produced from his pocket a hypodermic syringe.

"Never," was the perplexed and troubled reply.

The physician smiled a little satirically, and remarked, in a low aside, "I hope the drug has not affected the whole family. It's next to impossible to get at the truth in these cases."

"Do you think he will die?" was her agonized query.

"No, madam, we can soon bring him around, I think, and indeed he would probably come out of this excess unaided; but he had better die than continue his excessive use of morphia. I can scarcely conceive how you could have remained ignorant of the habit."

Mildred bowed her head in her hands with a low, despairing cry, for a flash of lurid light now revealed and explained all that had been so strange and unaccountable. The terrible secret was now revealed as far as she was able to comprehend it—her father was an opium inebriate, and this was but the stupor of a debauch! The thought of his death had been terrible, but was not this worse? She lifted her face in a swift glance at Roger, and saw him looking at her with an expression that was full of the strongest sympathy, and something more. She coldly averted her eyes, and a slow, deep flush of shame rose to her face. "Never shall I endure a humiliation but he will witness it, and be a part of it," was her bitter thought.

The physicians meanwhile changed their treatment, and were busy with professional nonchalance. Mrs. Jocelyn was at first too bewildered by their words and manner to do more than look at them, with hands clasping and unclasping in nervous apprehension, and with eyes full of deep and troubled perplexity. Then, as the truth grew clearer, that a reflection had been made upon her own and her husband's truth, she rose unsteadily to her feet, and said, with a pathetic attempt at dignity, "I scarcely understand you, and fear that you as little understand my husband's condition. He never concealed anything from me. He has been unfortunate and in failing health for months, and that is all. I fear, from your cruel and unjust surmises, that you do not know what you are doing, and that you are destroying his slender chances for life."

"Do you wish to discharge us, then?" was Dr. Benton's brusque response. He was a man of unusual skill, but blunt and unsympathetic, especially in cases wherein he suspected deception—an element almost inseparable from the morphia habit. The victim is almost invariably untruthful, and the family not unfrequently hide the whole truth in the desire to shield the disgraceful weakness. Dr. Benton was too familiar with the facts to be easily moved, but when the sad-hearted wife clasped her hands and cried, in tones that would touch the coldest heart, "I wish him to live, for his death would be far worse than death to us all," the physician said kindly, "There, there, Mrs. Jocelyn, I have seen many cases like this. Your husband will live, and will soon be able to speak to you. If you then can induce him to leave morphia alone, he may become as sound a man as ever."

Mildred put her arm around her mother and drew her into her room, closing the door.

A few minutes later Roger heard the wife's passionate protest, "I do not believe it—I will never believe it." Then Dr. Benton said to him, "Here, young man, run to my house for an electric battery."

When he returned Mr. Jocelyn was coming slowly out of his deep coma, and his appearance was changing rapidly for the better. There was a deep, indignant flush on Mrs. Jocelyn's face, and she took Roger aside and said earnestly, "Never believe the lies you heve heard here to-night. I know that you will never repeat them."

"Never, Mrs. Jocelyn."

But Mildred was pale and almost stony in her cold, calm aspect; her heart, in her desperation, was hard toward every one. Belle had not comprehended the truth at all, having been too much overwhelmed by her emotions to heed the earlier remarks of the physicians, and Mildred had said to them significantly and almost sternly, "There is no need of giving your diagnosis any further publicity."

Dr. Benton had then looked at her more attentively, and muttered, "An unusual girl; more's the pity."

"Mr. Atwood," Mildred began, a few moments after his entrance, "we thank you for your aid in this painful emergency, but we need trouble you no further. Papa is rallying fast. I will thank you to inform me of all the expense which you have incurred in our behalf at your earliest convenience."

"Mildred," interposed Mrs. Jocelyn, suddenly appearing from beside her husband's couch, the unwonted fire still burning in her unusually gentle eyes, "I cannot permit Mr. Atwood to be dismissed so coldly. He has been a true friend in the most terrible emergency of our lives. I must have a strong, kind hand to sustain me now that my husband, my life, has been foully slandered in his own home."

Belle, in even greater terror of being left alone, clung to his arm, and said, "He cannot leave us—he has made me a promise this night which will keep him here."

With a troubled and deprecating look at Mildred, Roger replied, "I will not fail you, Mrs. Jocelyn, nor you, Belle; but there is no further need of my intending on your privacy. I shall be within call all night."

"He can stay in my room," said Mrs. Wheaton, who, although aiding the physicians, could not help overhearing the conversation.

"No, he shall stay here," cried Belle, passionately; "I'm so unnerved that I'm almost beside myself, and he quiets me and makes me feel safer. Millie has no right to show her prejudice at such a time."

Mildred kissed him also, and answered, "We cannot think otherwise, papa, for our love, our lives, and all are bound up in you."

The morning dragged heavily away, for all except the little ones were under the impression that dark and woeful days were before them. Dr. Benton had not disguised the truth—that the problem with which they had to deal was one of great difficulty and much doubt. The prospect was depressing, but that which weighed like lead upon their hearts was the thought that one who had ever been their ideal of honor and truth had deceived them for months, and had steadily yielded to a habit which he knew must destroy his family's honor and leave them friendless, penniless, and disgraced. The weeeks of pain that Mildred had endured were not the result of a hard necessity, but of a vicious indulgence of a depraved appetite. Not disease but sin had so darkened their lives and brought them to a pass where even daily bread and shelter for the future were doubtful questions.

A thousand times Mildred asked herself, "How can I go out and face the world with my name blackened by this great cloud of shame?" She felt as if she never wished to step into the open light of day again, and the thought of Vinton Arnold made her shudder. "There is now a great gulf between us," she moaned. "The truth that my father is an opium slave can never be hidden, and even were Vinton inclined to be faithful, his family would regard me as a leper, and he will yield to their abhorrence."

The wound in both her own and her mother's heart was deep indeed. Their confidence was shattered, their faith in human goodness and honor destroyed. While they still hoped much, they nevertheless harbored a desperate fear, and, at best, the old serene trust could never return. Even if Mr. Jocelyn could rally and reform, there would ever remain the knowledge that he had once been weak and false, and might be again. He would be one who must be watched shielded, and sustained, and not one upon whom they could lean in quiet faith. The quaking earth which shatters into ruin the material home brings but a slight disaster compared with the vice that destroys a life-long trust in a husband and father.

Mr. Jocelyn's nerves were much too weak and irritable to endure his children's voices, and their innocence and unconsciousness of danger smote him with unendurable remorse; they were, therefore, sent to Mrs. Wheaton's room. There, too, Belle met Roger, and was much reassured by his hopeful words. She only half comprehended the truth concerning her father, and now, teeling the worst was past, her mercurial nature was fast regaining its cheerfulness. She was one who might despair one day and be joyous the next.

Like her father, she had unlimited courage, and but little fortitude. Although she did not know it, the outlook for her was more threatening than for any of the others, for she could not patiently submit to a slow, increasing pressure of poverty and privation. As her father feared, she might be driven to interpose the fatency of a reckless life.

Mr. Jocelyn was greatly reassured when Dr. Benton called, and treated him with much respect; and when a liberal allowance of morphia was injected into his arm, he became quite cheerful, believing that not only his family but even the physician were unaware, as yet, of his weakness. By neither sign nor word did Dr. Benton indicate his knowledge, for it was his design to rally his patient into the best possible condition, and then induce him to yield himself up wholly to medical skill, naturally believing that in his present enfeebled state he would shrink from entering on the decisive and heroic treatment required. Promising to call in the evening, he left Mr. Jocelyn apparently very much improved.

In the afternoon Mildred went to her room to seek a little rest. The physician thought he had given enough of the drug to satisfy his patient until he returned, but he had not properly gauged the morbid craving with which he was trying to deal, and as the day declined Mr. Jocelyn became very restless. Finally, he said he felt so much better that he would rise and dress himself, and, in spite of his wife's remonstrances, he persisted in doing so. Although tottering from weakness, he said, irritably, and almost imperiously, that he needed no help, and wished to be alone. With sad foreboding his wife yielded, and waited tremblingly fer his next step, for he had become to her an awful mystery.

Her fears were fulfilled, for he soon lifted the curtain door and looked at her in a strange, suspicious manner. "I miss some medicine from my vest pocket," he said hesitatingly.

Her face crimsoned, and she found no words with which to reply.

"Did you take it out?" he demanded sharply.

"No, she faltered.

His manner began to grow excited, and he looked like a distorted image of his former self. Anger, suspicion, fear, and cunning were all blended in his face, but he so far mastered himself as to assume a wheedling tone and manner as he came toward her and said, "Now it was only a little tonic that I found beneficial while in the south. You must know where it is. Please give it to me."

The poor woman was so overcome by her husband's appearance and falsehood that she felt sick and faint, and knew not what to say.

"Where is it?" he demanded angrily, for he felt that unless he had the support of the drug speedily, he would wholly lose his self-control.

"Oh, Martin," pleaded his wife, "wait till Dr. Benton comes; he will be here this evening."

"Why this ado about nothing? I merely wish to take a little tonic, and you look as if I proposed suicide."

"Martin, Martin, it is suicide of body and soul. It is worse than murder of me and your innocent children. Oh, Martin, my heart's true love, make me a Christmas gift that I will prize next to Him from the day is named. Give me the promise that you will never touch the vile poison again," and she knelt before him and sought to take his hand.

For a moment he was overwhelmed. She evidently knew all! He sank into a chair, and trembled almost convulsively. Then came the impulse—an almost inevitable effect of the drug upon the moral nature—to lie about the habit, and to strive to conceal it, even after an unclouded mind would see that deception was impossible.

Mildred, white and faint, sank into a chair by the table and buried her face in her arms, leaving the young fellow in sore perplexity as to what course he ought to take. He believed the physicans were right, and yet Mrs. Jocelyn had taken it for granted that he shared her faith in her husband's truth, and he knew she would banish him from her presence instantly should he betray a doubt as to the correctness of her view. At the same time the expression of his face had shown Mildred that he understood her father's condition even better than herself. It seemed impossible to perform the difficult and delicate part required of him, but with love's loyalty he determined to do what he imagined the young girl would wish, and he said firmly, "Belle, I again assure you that you can depend upon my promise to the utmost. Mrs. Jocelyn, my respect for you is unbounded, and the privilege of serving you is the best reward I crave. At the same time I feel that is is neither right nor delicate for me to witness sorrows that are so sacred. My part is to help, and not look on, and I can help just as well if within call all the time. Belle," he whispered, "dear Belle, I know you are unnerved by weeks of overwork as well as by this great trouble, but be a brave little woman once more, and all may soon be well," and he was about to withdraw when Dr. Benton appeared and said.

"Mrs. Jocelyn, your husband is now out of all immediate danger, but everything depends upon his future treatment. I wish this young man to remain a little longer, for you must now decide upon what course you will take. We have been called in in an emergency. There is no need that I should remain any longer, for the physician who accompanied him here is now amply competent to attend to the case. You have, however, expressed lack of confidence in us, and may wish to send for your own physician. If so, this young man can go for him at once. I can prove to you in two minutes that I am correct, and I intend to do so; then my responsibility ceases. Everything depends on your intelligent and firm co-operation with whatever physician has charge of the case, and it is no kindness to leave you under a delusion that does your heart more credit than your head or eyes."

He stepped back through the curtained doorway and returned with her husband's vest, from an inner pocket of which he took a hypodermic syringe, a bottle of Magendie's solution, and also another vial of the sulphate of morphia.

"I am an old physician," he resumed, "and know your husband's symptoms as well as you know his face. His possession of these articles should confirm my words. The slight scars upon his arms and elsewhere were made by this little instrument. As I can show you if you will come and observe—"

His medical logic was interrupted by a low cry from the stricken wife, and then she fainted dead away.

Mildred, on the contrary, stepped forward, with a pale, stern face, and said, "I will take charge of these," and she carried the agents of their ruin to her own room. Instantly she returned, and assisted Mrs Wheaton in the restoration of her mother

To Belle, who had looked on dazed, trembling, and bewildered, Roger whispered, "I shall be within call all night."

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN OPIUM'S MANIAC'S CHRISTMAS.

Beneath his brusque manner Dr. Benton masked a kind heart when once its sympathies were touched. He soon became satisfied that Mr. Jocelyn's family were not trying to shield his patient, but were, on the contrary, overwhelmed with dismay and shame at the truth which he had made clear to them. He therefore set about helping them, in his own prosaic but effective way, and he did not leave them until they were all as well and quiet as the dread circumstances of the situation permitted. Opium slaves are subject to accidents like that which had overtaken Mr. Jocelyn, who, through heedlessness or while half unconscious, had taken a heavy overdose, or else had punctured a vein with his syringe. Not infrequently habitues carelessly, recklessly, and sometimes deliberately end their wretched lives in this manner. Dr. Benton knew well that his patient was in no condition to enter upon any radical curative treatment, and it was his plan to permit the use of the drug for a few days, seeking meanwhile to restore as far as possible his patient's shattered system, and then gain the man's honest and hearty co-operation in the terrible ordeal essential to health and freedom. If Mr. Jocelyn had not the nerve and will-power to carry out his treatment—which he much doubted—he would advise that he be induced to go to an institution where the will of others could enforce the abstinence required. He belived that Mr. Jocelyn would consent to this, which convinced of his inability to endure the ordeal in his own strength. Having explained his intentions and hopes to Mrs. Jocelyn and Mildred, he left them cast down indeed, but not utterly devoid of hope.

It seemed to them that the husband and father must renounce the fatal habit at once, in response to their appeals. They could not understand that it was already beyond his power to break his chains—that they must be broken by other hands, if broken at all.

It may well be doubtful if the light of Christmas day dawned on a sadder household than that which was sheltered in the old mansion. Worn and exhausted to the last degree, and yet sleepless from anxiety, grief and shame, the two women watched beside the fitful, half-conscious man. At last he appeared to throw off his stupor sufficiently to recognize his wife; but it was with a strange look, in which were blended fear, suspicion and shame. A cold perspiration broke out over his whole form, for something in her expression, and especially in the aspect of Mildred's face, seemed to indicate that they knew all, and his own guilty fears and conscience made the surmise true for the moment; but the tender manner in which his wife wiped his brow and kissed him were reassuring, and with his rallying powers grew the hope that his weakness might yet be unknown and successfully concealed until, by his physician's aid, he had thrown off the curse. Fearing above and beyond all things else that his wife would learn his degradation, he slowly and fitfully tried to mature plans of deception; but his enfeebled mind rallied so slowly that he felt for a time that silence and observation were his best allies. He would cautiously and suspiciously feel his way, and having learned all that had transpired since he remembered being on the steamer, he could then decide more clearly how to shape his course. He therefore affected to regard his condition as the result of a severe illness, and murmured that "quiet and home life would soon bring him around."

"Nan," he began, as he grew a little quieter, "you take cruel advantage of my weak nerves. You must see that I am greatly reduced by illness, and I merely wish to take a little tonic as any sane man would do, and you treat me to a scene of high tragedy. Give me my medicine, and I know that I will soon be much better."

"Oh, my husband, has it really come to this?" and the wretched wife buried her face in her arms, and leaned heavily on the table.

He was growing desperate. Through excess he had already reached a point where ordinary life became an unendurable burden without the stimulant; but facing a harrowing scene like this was impossible. He felt that his appetite was like a savage beast on which he held a weakening and relaxing grasp. With the strange, double consciousness of the opium maniac, he saw his wife in all her deep distress, and he had the remorse of a lost soul in view of her agony; he was about certain that she knew how he had wronged her and his children, and he had all the shame and self-loathing of a proud, sensitive man; he knew that he was false to the sacred trusts of husband and father, and that awful thing we call a sense of guilt added its deep depression. It is not inability to comprehend his degradation, his danger, his utter loss of manhood, which opium imposes on its wretched slave, but an impossibility to do aught except gratify the resistless craving at any and every cost. All will-power has gone, all moral resistance has departed, and in its place is a gnawing, clamorous, ravening desire. The vitiated body, full of indescribable and mysterious pain, the still more tortured mind, sinking under a burden of remorse, guilt, fear, and awful imagery, both unite in one desperate, incessant demand for opium.

While his wife sat leaning upon the table, her face hidden, she was the picture of despair; and, in truth, she felt almost as if she were turning into stone. If her husband had been brought home a mangled, mutilated man, as she often feared he might be during the long years of the war, she would have bent over him with a tenderness equalled only by the pride and faith that had ever found in him their centre; but this strange apparition of a man with odd, sinister-looking eyes, who alternately threatened and cowered before her—this man, mutilated more horribly in the loss of truth and love, who was thus openly and shamelessly lying—oh, was he the chivalric, noble friend, who had been lover and husband for so many years! The contrast was intolerable, and the sense of his falseness stung her almost to madness. She did not yet know that opium, like the corruption of the grave, blackens that which is the fairest and whitest.

For a few minutes Mr. Jocelyn debated with himself. Was he strong enough to go out to the nearest drug store? After one or two turns up and down the room he found that he was not. He might fall in utter collapse while on the way, and yet his system, depleted by his recent excess, demanded the drug with an intensity which he could not restrain much longer without becoming wild and reckless. He therefore said to his wife, in a dogged manner, "Nan, I must have that medicine."

The gentle creature was at last goaded into such a burst of indignation for a few moments he was appalled, and trembled before her. The fire in her blue eyes seemed to scorch away her tears, and standing before him she said passionately "As you are a man and a Southern gentleman, tell me the truth. I never concealed a thought from you. What have you been concealing from us for weeks and months? I wronged you in that I did not think and plan day and night how to save instead of how to spend, and I can never forgive myself, but my fault was not deliberate, not intentional. There was never a moment when I tried to deceive you—never a moment when I would not have suffered hunger and cold that you and the children might be warmed and fed. What is this tonic for which you are bartering your health, your honor and ours, your children's bread and blood? Mildred sold her girlhood's gifts, the few dear mementoes of the old happy days, that you might have the chance you craved. That money was as sacred as the mercy of God. For weeks the poor child has earned her bread, not by the sweat of her brow, but in agony of body and unhappiness of heart. If it were disease that had so cast us down and shadowed our lives with fear, pain, and poverty, we would have submitted to God's will and watched over you with a patient tenderness that would never have faltered or murmured; but it's no disease, it's not something that God sent. It is that which crimsons our faces with shame."

He sat cowering and trembling before her, with his face buried in his hands.

In a sudden revulsion of tenderness she sank again on her knees before him, and pleaded in tones of tenderest pathos "Martin, I know all; but I am ready to forgive all if you will be true to me from this time forward. I know now the cause of all your strange moods which we attributed to ill-health; I know the worst; but if, in humble reliance upon God, you will win back your manhood, the past evil days shall be blotted out, even as God blots out our sins and remembers them no more against us. We will sustain your every effort with sympathy and loving faith. We will smile at cold and hunger that you may have time—Great God!" and she sprang to her feet, white, faint and panting.

Her husband had taken his hands from his face, and glared at her like a famished wolf. In his desperate, unnatural visage there was not a trace of manhood left.

"Give me the bottle of morphine you took from my pocket," he demanded, rising threateningly. "No words; you might as well read the Ten Commandments to an unchained tiger. Give it to me, or there is no telling what may happen. You talk as if I could stop by simply saying, coolly and quietly, I will stop. Ten thousand devils! haven't I suffered the torments of the damned in trying to stop! Was I not in hell for a week when I could not get it? Do you think I ask for it now as a child wants candy? No, it's the drop of water that will cool my tongue for a brief moment, and as you hope for mercy or have a grain of mercy in your nature, give it to me *now, now, now!*"

The poor wife tottered a step or two toward her daughter's room, and fell swooning at the threshold. Mildred opened the door, and her deep pallor showed that instead of sleeping she had heard words that would leave scars on memory until her dying day.

"The poison you demand is there," she said brokenly, pointing to her bureau. "After mamma's appeal I need not, cannot speak," and she knelt beside her mother.

Her father rushed forward and seized the drug with the aspect of one famishing. Mildred shuddered and would not see more than she could help, but gave her whole thought and effort to her mother, who seemed wounded unto death. After a few moments to her unbounded surprise her father knelt beside her and lifted her mother to a lounge, and with a steady hand and a gentle considerate manner sought to aid in her restoration. His face was full of solicitude and anxiety—indeed he looked almost the same as he might have looked and acted a year ago, before he had ever imagined that such a demon would possess him.

When at last Mrs. Jocelyn revived and recalled what had occurred, she passed into a condition of almost hysterical grief, for her nervous system was unstrung. Mr. Jocelyn, meanwhile, attended upon her in a silent, gentle, self-possessed manner that puzzled Mildred greatly, although she ascribed it to the stimulant he had taken.

After a few minutes a strange smile flitted across his face, and he disappeared within his own apartment. A little later, Mildred, returning from a momentary absence, saw him withdraw his syringe from the arm of her half-conscious mother.

"What have you done?" she asked sternly, and hastening to his side.

Secreting the instrument as a miser would his gold, he answered, with the same strange smile, "She shall have a merry Christmas yet; I have just remembered the day. See how quiet she is becoming; see that beautiful flush stealing into her pale face; see the light dawning in her eye. Oh, I gauged the dose with the skill of the best of them; and see, my hand is as steady as yours. I'm not a wreck yet, and all may still be well. Come, this is Christmas night, and we will keep it in good old Southern style. Where are Belle and the children? Ah! here they are. Where have you been, Belle?"

"In Mrs. Wheaton's room," she replied, looking at her father in much surprise. "I was trying to keep the children quiet, so that you, mamma, and Millie might have a little rest."

"That was