

vice, and who feel that you are among the first few to whom they are indebted for the better order of things which is coming, have insisted on clubbing together to afford you every comfort in your illness."

The slate dropped from his hand, and he *wrote* no more. Did they both forget the physician's injunction that he should not speak?

"May God bless them for it!" burst feebly from his lips, yet more hurriedly than the phrase could have been written; "and yet," he continued, "they can ill afford it, especially now that they want every guinea to further the plans of the Association for their relief. Oh! Alice, is it really true that so many of the employers have joined?"

"Many," returned Alice, almost joyfully; "many of the most respectable houses already close at seven; and, though they are prepared to suffer a little at first, from the opposition of those who keep open, they seem at last to be carrying out your favourite motto, 'to follow the right whithersoever it may lead.' Nay, they do say that the hours of toil will ultimately be reduced to ten,—enough for poor humanity, *as we know who have worked.*"

"And for me to rob them at such a time!" murmured Howard, sinking his head upon the shoulder of Alice. She kissed his cheek—his lips—his forehead—and felt the hot tears streaming from his eyes.

"There is a way," said Alice, softly, her cheek tingling, she knew not why,—"*there is a means for present need, if it could be adopted. You know my uncle will not give me a farthing of my hundred pounds, nor can I touch it for some months to come;—yet—yet—it is so left—that—that—if I had married, it would have become my husband's.*"

"Well, dearest?"

Alice again paused, but her cheek leaned against his—her lips touched his ear—and she murmured, "Could it not so be yours?"

For a while there was no audible answer. William Howard raised his head from Alice Markham's shoulder, and gazed for a moment on the dark and earnest eyes which met his own with no coquettish shrinking, but with a look that revealed the depths of her soul.

"No, never!" he exclaimed, in a louder voice than had been heard for many weeks; and while he twined his arms around her with something of recovered strength, words of endearment burst from his lips, and broken phrases that might be interpreted, "Youth's bright imaginings, and

poet's dreams, are dull delusions compared with such a heart as this!"

And then came the paroxysm of the cough, after so much excitement, and he sank back on his pillows as helpless as an infant. A little while, and they spoke of death, not marriage, quite calmly; and yet his frame shook when Alice murmured, "I—I—will be as a child to your mother—and Herbert, too. Oh, William! he will not disgrace your teaching."

Again the horrid knell of that painful, tearing cough; and once more his head drops fondly on her shoulder. But there is a gush of something that comes even hotter and faster than scalding tears; in the cough he has broken a blood-vessel, and the life stream flows from his pale lips on the bosom of his faithful, high-hearted Alice! A few hours of mortal life were all that remained to William Howard.

Reader, this is a common story; one that in all its human emotions has been felt and acted thousands of times. There is something so blinding in custom, that the best and wisest of us are slow to see evils that do not come directly home to us. How many a gentle and sensitive woman, that has wept over the vivid pages of romance, or lent her keenest sympathies to the ideal sorrows of the drama, has, month after month, and year after year, visited the gay and gorgeous shops of the "Metropolitan Drapers," without so much as dreaming of the deep and real tragedies that were enacting "behind the counter." The blighted youth—the ruined health—the early graves—the withered minds—the corrupted morals—and, oh! the noble spirits, the true heroes of private life, who, standing forward to cheer and teach, by precept and example, have won the guerdon of eternal gratitude from their class. To my mind, it seems there must have been many William Howards ere the "Metropolitan Drapers' Association" could have been formed; an association now encouraged and assisted by clergy, members of parliament, influential, literary and philanthropic gentlemen, and the most respectable employers in London.

And alas! there must have been many a selfish, narrow-minded man, like Mr. Markham, with heart contracted by the very system he attempted to uphold, ere the wrongs of the oppressed could have grown so deep as to require such a remedy.

Gentle, kind-hearted lady, who would not hurt a noxious insect in your path—who, if your pet bird pined in its gilded cage, would open the door to give it the option of liberty—think how much good there is in your power to do! Remember that units make up the millions.