

WHEN IS THE TIME TO DIE?

I asked the glad and happy child,
Whose hands were filled with flowers,
Whose silvery laugh rang free and wild
Among the vine-wreathed bowers.

I crossed her sunny path, and cried
"When is the time to die?"
"Not yet, not yet"—the child replied,
And swiftly bounded by.

I asked a maiden back she threw
The tresses of her hair;
Grief's traces o'er her cheeks, I know,
Like pearls they glistened there.

A flush passed o'er her lily brow,
I heard her spirit sigh—
"Not now," she cried, "Oh, no! not now!
Youth is no time to die!"

I asked a mother, as she pressed,
Her first-born in her arms,
As gently on her tender breast
She hushed her babe's alarms.

In quivering tones her accents came,
Her eyes were dim with tears—
"My boy his mother's life must claim
For many, many years."

I questioned one in manhood's prime,
Of proud and fearless air,
His brow was furrowed not by time,
Nor dimmed by woe or care:

In angry accents he replied,
And flashed with scorn his eye—
"Talk not to me of death," he cried,
"For only age should die."

I questioned age—for whom the tomb
Had long been all prepared—
But death, who withers youth and bloom,
This man of years had spared.

Once more his nature's dying fire
Flashed high, and thus he cried—
"Life—only life—is my desire,"
And gasped, and groaned, and died.

I asked a Christian: "Answer thou—
When is the hour of death?"
A holy calm was on his brow,
And peaceful was his breath,

And sweetly o'er his features stole,
A smile, a light divine,
He spake the language of his soul—
"My Master's time is mine!"

THE HOUSEHOLD WRECK.

BY MINNIE MYSTLE.

And so the pretty farm is sold, and the house which has been tenanted by those of the same family name for nearly a century, has passed into other hands. Strangers are seen going to and out, and the garden and terraced walks echo the footsteps of those to whom it is not dear as the birth place of their fathers and fathers' fathers for many generations. The pretty farm is sold! And what caused the ruin of a household—deprived the sons of an inheritance, and the daughter of a home? Ah, it is a sad story of many thousand in our land! It has all been mortgaged by inches to buy rum!

He who owned it, inherited it unincumbered. There was a rich meadow of many broad acres, whose banks were washed by the river which wound lazily round, beneath the shadows of tall elms and spreading oaks, and the soil yielding abundantly with only the ordinary labour of the husbandman.

Over on the hill side were the densely wooded timber lots, from which the winter fires might have been supplied for centuries, and still left the forest in all its grandeur. At its feet stretched the sunny pastures, where cowslips and clover grew in rich profusion, and the sheep and lazy herds grazed all the summer months, and slacked their thirst in the pebbly brook which meandered along its borders.

The house was an antique, and stood upon the brow of the gently sloping hill. It was built in the olden time, when convenience was little studied by designers and builders, but the site on which its foundation rested overlooked all the surrounding country. From the windows the owner could look far away over the fields he cultivated, see the river winding among the intervals, and the brook gleaming through the tasselled shrubbery that hung over its silvery surface—the road, with its many curves and windings, along which the harvest men jogged merrily, with their loaded carts of mown hay or golden sheaves—the blue hills in the distance and the green hills near by, making a landscape such as a southern valley can present, and a southern farmer may behold with an honest pride.

The garden lay smilingly out in the sunshine; and a professed horticulturist could not have planned it more tastefully, or manifested more pleasure in trellising the delicate

tendrils of that grape-vine that climbed over the latticed bower, or pruning the stems of the gay and parti-coloured flowers that decked the borders of the beds, and made a pleasant contrast with the bright green tufted mounds. How many times have I passed it, long after the shades of evening had gathered around the valley, and seen its useful owner smoothing the terrace, adding some beauty to the hill-side, though all the day he had toiled in the field, and would have only a little time to rest ere he must again go forth to labour.

He married young, a farmer's daughter of a neighbouring county, and never had a young farmer a better prospect in the beginning of life than he. He was industrious and frugal, but his wife did not prove either efficient or economical. "O how much depends on the wife!" is repeated till it is trite, but it is not half realized. She was not so refined in her taste, not so high-minded or intelligent as her husband. All her influence went to drag him down. He would have preferred companionship with the cultivated, and might have been led by a gentle voice had a loving heart gave up all that was degrading. One who understood her mission and was willing to study in all things to be a helpmeet to her husband, who was also capable of improvement herself, might have won him to self-denial and a higher life. But she cared for no society but the low and gossiping. She surrounded him with those who were fond of wine and strong drink. She enjoyed the coarse jests, and vulgar ribaldry of his companions; and never on any occasion spoke a word to dissuade him from his downward course.

The Sabbath was a day of feasting, and their house the resort of idlers, who had no respect for things sacred. In a few years they were almost as much isolated from all refined and cultivated society as if they had lived in the desert. Children grew up with soured embittered feeling toward all around them. They were taught to look upon those who cultivated their minds, and adopted a style of living in accordance with good taste and refinement, as proud and aristocratic, and encouraged to avoid instead of imitating them. The store and tavern, where the vulgar herds convened, were their places of diversion.

In the meantime the poison was at work, and he who dealt it out, and allured the unwary to destruction, was growing rich upon the spoils. Day by day he poured out the liquid fire, which he knew was burning into the very heart's core, destroying mind, and soul, and body, withering every energy, taking the bread from the mouths of children, and desolating a hearthstone around which children and children's children had so long gathered, and exulted in his inhuman traffic. Houses and lands were added to his possessions—he grew rich and was crowned with honours, such as the vulgar are so ready to lavish on those who hoard money—no matter if it is coined from the very life-blood of the widow and the orphan, and stamped with the tears of those who are perishing with hunger and nakedness. Oh, why do not the stones cry against such injustice, or the earth open and swallow up those who thus pollute its surface.

But though the destroyer was silent, and surely at work, there were no evidences of his ruthless hand upon the premises. The land was faithfully tilled, and the crops faithfully harvested, and though he who toiled diligently from morning to night often recoiled to his work, the little garden exhibited no signs of neglect; the flower-beds were as neatly bordered, and the honey suckles and morning glories were trained and pruned as tenderly as if the mind had not been shattered, and the body wasted of its strength. The tall shade trees interlaced their gigantic stems, and formed a lofty bower about the dwelling, but never were they left to look scraggy and old. All without was neat, and trim, and tasteful, but alas, all within was without beauty, or taste, or method. The fireside was never bright and cheerful. There were no evidences of the skillful hand of woman on the wall, or the mantle shelf or the work table.

Everything had a sombre and repulsive look, and the atmosphere a chilly and unwholesome dampness. You could not enter the house without feeling that the ennobling influence of a pure-minded woman had never shed its radiance there.

Now and then, conscience, or rather the fear of an untimely death, awoke the slumbering energies of the self-destroyer, and he would resolve to "touch not, taste not, handle not," and for a little while would keep his resolution, and then would come the tempter with his soft speech and flattering tongue, and resolution, and thought and energy would be drowned in the bewildering draught, and another step would be taken down into the deep pit of destruction.

The grave-yard was often passed as he went to his daily labour, and one evening, as he was staggering by, his companions pointed him to a fresh mound, beneath which had recently been lain one who had been their companion through all the days of boyhood, and youth, and ripening manhood, and they had dearly loved. In the vigour and prime of life he had gone down to a drunkard's grave! "Yes," said his companion, "and ere another winter's

snows shall have melted from the green sward, you will have followed him, unless you retire to your downward steps. He might have lived a hale old man, of three score years and ten, gathered like a shock of corn fully ripe, had he lived a temperate man. But he was cut down in the midst of his days, and his death was not the less anticipated because it was produced in years instead of an hour.

He who listened had already experienced the horrors of delirium tremens, and this terrible disease had terminated the life of the friend upon whose grave they were now gazing, and there he made a new resolution that he would cast off the fetters that bound him, the chains which were dragging him to perdition, and lead a new life. For a year the maddening cup did not touch his lips. But there was no kind voice to cheer him on, or command his noble efforts. His fireside was no brighter, and the face of his wife no less gloomy. His former companions deserted him, and there were no new ones of a better class in their place. He was prostrated without his usual excitement, and could not perform his ordinary amount of labour. So he returned to his idols, and never again attempted to cast them away.

He loved his children, and was proud, as fathers often are, of his daughters, who were pretty, and more than ordinarily interesting. But he had not the means of educating them, though they were fully impressed by their ignorant mother with the vulgar idea that their birth and lineage made them ladies. They endeavoured in many little ways to brighten their home and make it more cheerful; but the voices of their parents, which were like a weight upon their spirits, drove them very early in life, to efforts for self-support, and they went forth among strangers to toil as common servants to earn the bread which their father sold for rum. His sons were without ambition, and grew up coarse and grovelling in their tastes; and having no healthy incentive to labour at home, or pleasure in the family circle, they too, early went forth into a world of temptation to be corrupted and destroyed.

So, day by day, and inch by inch, the meadow and pastures, and hill-side were bargained away, and still almost unconsciously; for no mention was made of accounts, and the long column of debt and credit was now exhibited, and no warning words were spoken, till the vultures were ready to swoop upon their prey.

The farm, the homestead, and all his possessions had been bartered, and he had in return a shattered constitution, and an utterly debased and ruined mind. The cup of ruin had been drained to the dregs; and he who, only a little while ago was the owner of a proud domain, might have lived to a good old age, comfortable and independent, and left a pretty inheritance to his children, went forth a beggar, and is fast degenerating into a helpless vagabond. He is only yet in middle life, and without home, or friends, or comfort, the victim of a depraved appetite, and soon for him also will open a drunkard's grave.

The pretty farm is sold, strangers are strolling leisurely in the shadows of those tall old trees, with no reverence for the hand that planted them and only contempt for him who, for worse than a mess of pottage, sold his birthright. They may be happy within those grey old walls, on which he who built them fondly hoped that no name but his would ever be inscribed, and within which none of those in whose veins should not flow his blood should ever dwell; but no more justly did they come by their ill-gotten gains than the midnight thief and the unprincipled marauder.

They have no more reverence either for the God who avenges, and no fear of retribution; yet it may come, for there is woe pronounced against those who lay snares for their neighbours' feet, and who put the cup to their neighbours' lips, and who lay wait to destroy. But may mercy be dealt out to them instead of judgment, for a terrible doom would be theirs, who had done, not only one, but all these things.

But their little household is wrecked, and their inheritance passed away forever. Oh, it is sad to see a home blighted, and the fire upon an ancient hearthstone go out in darkness and woe. But how many have been thus desolated in our fair land by this insidious foe. How stealthy are his footsteps as he creeps over threshold, where he comes to spread the blight and the mildew, to give poverty for riches, and for bright hopes and light hearts, crushed and broken spirits, wretchedness and woe.

It is the monster evil, and comes in a thousand forms to charm its victims to the very verge of the pit. But though I have often seen it enter the cot of the humble, make the poor poorer, and the desolate utterly forsaken, it never before seemed so terrible as when I saw the proud family of this old homestead go forth bowed and stricken, with not a lingering look upon the meadows, the woodlands, the garden, or the hill side, to take shelter in the hut of poverty, and live henceforth upon the pittance which the day labourer, paralyzed and broken, might be able to command.

I turned away in bitter anguish from the sight, and may it be a lesson which shall encourage the humble and prove a timely warning to the proud; for whose eateth the bread of idleness shall in due time reap an abundant reward, and whose wasteth his subsistence in riotous living shall be brought low.