

say that wi' her venom against my ain Kirk, she has gien my stamick a turn ag'inst hers. I believe this bigoted body has rooted in my heart a feelin' that I never learned afore, and a feelin' that shouldna be in my heart."

"Recollect, John, that all the bitterness your mother-in-law shows on this subject has been infused into her by others. She is suffering from the dregs of an epidemic which she caught many years ago. She is really not responsible for these prejudices. The Free Church is a great and useful body, and must not be judged of by either its worst members or worst measures. Take good care you do not become a bigot, too, John. I do not say you have anything of that in your constitution naturally, for they who love their own without despising or censuring another's, are no bigots. Regard your wife's mother with kindly compassion, take no notice of her ravings, and they will soon cease."

"Ah! but she's makin' Nelly as bigoted as bersel', and that's what mortifies and grieves me. She has trysted her awa wi' her frae our ain Kirk, and Sunday after Sunday I sit in that hallowed hoose alane, whereas Nelly used aye to gang wi' me and keep me company. This is a sair blow to me; it has brocht a cloud upon my heart. Oo! we liket ilk ither weel; whaur I gaed she gaed, what I thoct she thoct, and our hearts just simmered in ane anither. Noo it's changed! it's changed! the wonerfu' sweet spell seems to be brackin', the bonnie gowden licht o' love's early day is fadin' awa, and the future looks bald and cauld and drear!"

The poor man, before he closed the last sentence, was fairly overcome. I understood the depth of his feelings, and the ghastly prospect which his imagination was picturing. He felt as if the magical chain of love was being severed link by link, and the very life of life was passing away.

"But the worst is to be mentioned," he continued. "I dinna ken hoo to express my feelins on this ither point. The auld woman, as you are aware, has an evil habit o' drinkin', and I hae a horrible and fearful dread i' my heart lest Nelly gang the same gate. She can hardly help learnin' this frae her mither in the lang run, though, the Lord be thankit, she hasna done that yet, but greets for her mither's folly, and hates the cause o't. Do you think she'll learn to drink, sir?"

"I hope and trust not, but I am convinced that the sooner your wife's mother returns to her own house the better. You told me she has a married daughter in K——, who will, of course, look after her, and you can send her, as formerly, any little assistance you are able."

"But Nelly winna hear o' this proposal—there's the difficulty; and I've said a' I could say, short o' pittin' the auld woman oot o' the door by force, and this, you ken, I couldna do for Nelly's sake,—but if she dinna leave, I'll leave, that's the end o' the matter!"

"I'll leave" was said in a tone of determined energy. "Well," I replied, "I suppose you would like me to advise with Nelly on this subject."

"That's what I wantit to ask o' you—in a quiet way. Mayb' your words would hae more force nor mine, or would help to send mine hame. I ken she'll listen to you wi' respect."

Soon after this affecting interview with the perplexed and unhappy man, I found an opportunity of entering on the subject with Nelly, alone. Making use of every argument, I advised her, in the strongest language, to consent to send away her mother to her own home. I told her how miserable she was making her husband without any occasion whatever, how deeply he seemed to me to be attached to her, and how dangerous it was to tamper in this persistent manner with his temper and his affections. I hinted that she might drive him into intemperance, that she might cause him to absent himself from his own house, where he seemed of late to have little happiness, and make him seek after other society and other consolations, and that in the end she might have cause to repent her conduct in bitter and unavailing tears. Her only reply to me was—tears, and "I canna pit awa my mither. She aye clung to me."

I thought now of speaking to the old woman herself, but a little reflection assured me that this would be vain. So strong was her bigotry against the Church of Scotland, that I read clearly in her countenance I had no place in her heart.

A week after this I called at John's again, to see if there were any signs of the enemy retiring from the camp. I found the evil genius of the place still there. She was sitting at the fireside, holding her apron over her mouth,—her daughter, the shoemaker's wife, seated at the opposite side, scrubbing and crying,—and the three children, Tam, Mary and Maggie, supping together out of a capful of oatmeal porridge on the table, without milk. The baby—happiest of all that household—was fast asleep in the cradle. John had actually fled. His wife, when I entered, rose, and, handing me a chair, bade me sit down. "That's a' he's left ahin'," she said, producing a small strip of brown leather on which these words were scrawled with pen and ink: "FAREWELL, Nelly. May He that's aboon protect you and the bairns. Your mither has done this. Mark iii. 25." "It was laid," she added, "between the leaves o' the Bible."

I was stunned at the intelligence of John Gerry's flight. I had believed him to be a man of superior principle and of deep affections, and did not think that he was capable of abandoning his wife and children. "Do you think," I asked, "he has really forsaken you and his little ones—really gone off not to return?"