

THAT WINTER.

BY EDITH AUBURN.

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CHAPTER V.

The autumn continued unusually fine—the days warm and sunshiny and the nights free from frost. The breath of summer seemed loth to give place to the icy winds of winter. The young men of the town, taking advantage of this weather, planned an excursion down the river to a noted and beautiful hunting-ground. They were to go by steamer, and as the pleasure of the day would not be complete without them, they were to ask their lady friends. Mabel declined going; her deep mourning for her sister, and her anxiety for her father and brother decided her in doing so; but Mrs. Allan and Lucy accompanied Edgar.

Early in the morning the party from the rectory set out in great spirits—an opposite neighbor and intimate friend of Edgar's being with them.

This young man, John Robertson, was his mother's favorite son, and for him she had sacrificed the comfort of the rest of her family. He was gay, called "good company," could sing the best comic song, or move to tears with a plaintive one; was an excellent instrumental player—indeed there were few things in which he did not excel; but he was scarcely ever free from the influence of liquor.

Mabel's attention was particularly attracted to Mrs. Robertson that morning. For long after the party drove off she stood straining her eyes down the road they had gone. As she was about to turn into the house her eye rested on a flower, which her son had thrown away when arranging a few for his button-hole. Quickly picking up the half-crushed pansy, she gave one more look down the street, and returned to her house.

But Mabel soon forgot Mrs. Robertson

and her pansy in something that was troubling her mind.

The evening previous, Edgar, contrary to his usual practice, came into the drawing-room after dinner and asked her to play some particular pieces of music. She would willingly have gratified him, had it been at a less sacrifice of feeling; but the pieces he named she had last played in her sunny home in the South, before the war-note had sounded through the land, and she felt she could not break the spell that associated them with the past. Pleading headache, which she really felt, she retired to her room. Not long after she heard the hall-door close, and Kitty running up the stairs.

"Miss Rivers, may I come in? Didn't I tell you Mr. Edgar would be a callin' you a hippercrit? I was in the back hall when he was a goin' out, an' he said to Mr. Fred, 'She's just like the rest, a cantin' hippercrit. Why couldn't she 'a given a little music an' made home pleasant for a feller for once—but no—she has a headache.' Now, Miss Rivers, sure as I live, he'll go to one of them saloons an' come home tight at twelve. You listen, an' you'll hear him as the clock strikes, an' it all comes of your not playin'."

About twelve Mabel did hear him come in. His father met him in the hall, and she heard him say in his usual clear and never-varying tones,—

"How long is this going to continue? You not only disgrace yourself but all connected with you."

A hiccupped reply, too inaudible to be known, then,—

"I tell you what it is, if you cannot drink like a gentleman you shall not drink at all."

She heard no more, but after this fell into a troubled sleep of a few hours.