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THE DRUNKARD'S WIFE.

AN OUVRE TRUE TALE.

The grey morning was already dawning when a miserable wretch turned into a dirty alley, and entering a low, ruinous door, groped through a narrow entry, and paused at the entrance of a door within. That degraded being had once been a wealthy man, respected by his neighbours, surrounded by friends. But alas, the glass had first lured him to indulgence and then to inebriety, until he was now a common drunkard.

The noise of his footsteps had been heard within, for the creaking door was immediately opened, and a pale, emaciated boy, about nine years old, stepped out on the landing, and looked in mingled anxiety and dread.

'Is that you, father?'

'Yes, wet to the skin,—curse it,' said the man—'why don't you abed and asleep, you brat.'

The little fellow shrunk back at this coarse salutation at will, though shaking with fear, he did not quit his station before the door.

'What are you standing there, gaping for?' said the wretch,—'it's bad enough to hear a sick wife grumbling all day, without having you kept up at night to chime in, in the morning,—get to bed, you imp, do you hear?'

The little fellow did not answer, fear seemed to have deprived him of speech, but still holding on to the door latch, with an imploring look, he stood right in the way by which his parent would have to enter the room.

'Ain't you going to mind?' said the man, breaking into a fury, 'give me the lamp and go to bed, or' . . .

'Oh! father, don't talk so loud,' said the little fellow, bursting into tears—'you'll wake mother. she's been worse all day, and hasn't had any sleep till now,'—and as the man made an effort to snatch the candle, the boy, losing all personal fears in anxiety for his sick mother, stood firmly across the drunkard's path and said—'you mustn't,—you mustn't go in.'

'What does the brat mean?' broke out the inebriate angrily—'this comes of leaving you to wait on your mother till you learn to be as obstinate as a mule—will you disobey me!—take that, and that, you imp,' and raising his hand he struck the little sickly being to the floor, kicked aside his body, and strode into the dilapidated room.

It was truly a fitting place for the home of such a vagabond as he. The walls were low, covered with smoke, and riddled with a hundred cracks. The chimney piece had never been white, but was now of the greasy lead color of age. The ceiling had lost most of the plaster, and the rain soaking through, dripped with a monotonous tick upon the floor. A few broken chairs, a cracked looking glass, and a three-legged table, on which was a rimless cup, were in different parts of the room. But the most striking spectacle was a wretchedly before the gambler. On a rickety bed lay the wife

of his bosom, the once rich and beautiful Emily Lahguerre, who, through poverty, shame, and sickness, had still clung to the lover of her youth.

Oh! woman, constancy the world cannot shake, nor shame nor misery subdue. Friend after friend had deserted that ruined man; indignity after indignity had been heaped upon him, and deservedly year by year he had fallen lower and lower in the sink of infamy; and yet still through every mishap that sainted woman had clung to him,—for he was the father of her boy, and the husband of her youth. It was a hard task for her to perform, but it was her duty, and when all the world deserted him should she too leave him. She had borne much, but alas, nature could bear no more. Health had fled from her cheeks, and her eyes were dim and sunken. She was in the last stage of consumption, but it was not that which was killing her,—she was dying of a broken heart.

The noise made by her husband awoke her from her troubled sleep, and she half started up in bed, the hectic fire streaming along her cheek, and a wild fitful light shooting into her sunken eyes. There was a faint, shadowy smile lighted up her face, but it was as cold as moonlight upon snow. The sight might have moved a felon's bosom, but what can prostrate the seared and hardened heart of drunkenness? The man besides was in a passion.

'Woman,' said the wretch, as he reeled into the room—'is this the way you receive me after being out all day in the rain to get something for your brat and you? Come, don't go to whining, I say'—but as his wife uttered a faint cry at his brutality, and fell back senseless on the bed, he seemed to awaken to a partial sense of his condition, he reeled a step or two forward, put his hand up to his forehead, stared wildly around, and then gazing almost vacantly upon her, continued, 'but—why—what's the matter?'

His poor wife lay like a corpse before him, but a low voice from the other side of the bed, answered, and its tones quivered as they spoke.

'Oh! mother's dead!' It was the voice of his son who had stolen in, and was now sobbing violently as he tried to raise her head in his little arms. He had been for weeks her only nurse, and had long since learned to act for himself. He bathed her temples, he chafed her limbs, he invoked her wildly to awake.

'Dead!' said the man, and he was sobered at once—'dead,' he continued in a tone of horror that would have chilled the blood, and advancing by the bedside, with eyes starting from their sockets, he laid his hand upon her marble brow, 'then, oh Heaven I have killed her!—Emily you are not dead, say so, oh!—speak and forgive your repentant husband!' and kneeling by the bedside he chafed her white, thin hand, watering it with his hot tears as he sobbed her name.

Their efforts, at length, partially restored her, and the first thing she saw upon reviving was her husband weeping by her side, and calling her 'Emily!' It was the first time