

Tales and Sketches.

DRUNK IN THE STREET.

Drunk in the street !
A woman arrested to-day in the city !
Comely and young, the paper said ;
Scarcely twenty, the item read ;
A woman and wife—kind angels pity !
Drunk in the street !

Drunk in the street !
Yes, crazy with liquor ; her brain on fire !
Reeling, plunging, staggering along,
Singing a strain of a childish song ;
At last she stumbles and falls in the mire—
Drunk in the street !

Drunk in the street !
Drag her away to the station-bed ;
Helpless, senseless, take her away ;
Shut her up from the light of the day ;
Would, for the sake of her friends, she were dead !
Drunk in the street !

Draw nigh and look !
On a couch of straw in a station-cell
Is lying a form of matchless mould,
With hair dishevelled, so pale and cold,
Yet tainting the air with the fumes of hell !
Draw nigh and look !

How sad the sight !
The sunlight is streaming across the floor,
It rouses the sleeper to life again ;
But, oh ! the anguish, the grief, the pain,
As thoughts of her shame came crowding o'er—
How sad the sight !

But hark ! a sound !
The bolt flies back, she is told to rise ;
Her friends are waiting to take her home.
They know all, yet in love they come ;
But with speechless lips and tearless eyes—

Behold her now !
She goes all trembling with shame away.
Her brain still clouded with fumes of rum,
And turns her tottering feet towards home
And the hearts she left but yesterday—
How different now !

Close we the scene !
Fall, O night ! o'er the saddest sight
That ever appeared to mortal view ;
Shield, O skies ! with your vaulted blue,
Shut, O gates of memory ! tight—
Close we the scene !

— B. Wicks, M. D.

THE COACHMAN'S STORY, OR, "I HAVE A REASON FOR IT."

"You'll take a glass of brandy, coachman?" said a stout gentleman, getting down from the Sutton stage coach, as it stopped at the Beil and Cuckoo Inn.

"No, thank you, sir," was the reply.

The traveller looked up, wondering if he heard aright—a coachman refusing to drink, but seeing nothing but firm resolve in the honest face which met his gaze, and as the cold sleet of a March evening made it no fit place to hold any argument, he shrugged his shoulders and hurried into the Inn.

Some few new passengers entered the coach, and the horses cantered on, glad, no doubt, to make the best of their way home to their stable.

"It is not often a person like you refuses a glass, coachman," said a gentleman sitting by his side on the box seat.

"Why, no, Sir, but then you see I have a reason for it."

"Yes, yes, no doubt," said the gentleman ; "I hope you will not think me rude in taking notice of such a circumstance."

"Oh, no!" was the reply, and then after a short pause—"I have a reason for it."

The silence was kept for perhaps a mile, varied only by the shrill noises made from time to time by the driver in urging on his team. But it was

suddenly broken by the coachman saying, "There was a time, Sir, when I could not have refused that glass—ah ! and worst luck to me when I did not try nor wish to refuse it, but it's many years since then, Oh, oh?"

He looked over his shoulder to see who were the outsiders before he begun, for he was not a man who would have told all his troubles in the Market Place. There was no one nearer to them than those who were at the back of the coach, and seeing that the open face and fearless eye of the gentleman who sat beside him, told of a heart within which could partly feel another's sorrows, he went on—"It's many years ago now, I drove the Liverpool coach then, not a short stage like this—there was no rail then, and we did almost as we liked on the road, carrying sometimes very great people, and sometimes just the reverse, you see.

"Coming home one beautiful Spring day I had a good load, and beside me sat a young man, one of the Talbot family, and they be great folks in that part of the country. He was full of spirit, and had just come home from China, and was on his way to his father's hall. He had got all the boisterous spirit for fun of the navy, where he served as an officer.

"Every place we stopped at he called for rum, some for himself, and some for me, for I had not learned then to refuse, till at last we were both far from sober, though many would have considered we were but moderate. Things went on in this way till we got near to Stafford ; by this time we were singing and shouting, and what few people we passed on the road, stood to stare at the four grays bounded along, bearing such a load of noise.

"The evening was coming on, and a fog was fast settling on field and river, so that we would not see far before us, when, in turning a corner of the road, I don't know how it happened, but I always think young Talbot was reaching to get the lines, as he had asked me many times to let him drive ; but be that as it may, I saw a man in front of us with two children, the three horses swerved, there was a loud shriek, the coach seemed to jump over an impediment, and then the frightened horses seemed to fly for very life. We might have got into the town safely, but just in our way was a narrow old bridge, and there the road curved a little. I had lost all power by this time over the horses, and in turning over the bridge, down the coach came with a crash.

"When I came to myself, I found the night had gone, and it was noon of next day ; I was in bed, and the first face I saw was that of my wife, for we lived near there then. She looked anxious, and I could see the marks of tears on her face—"What's the matter?" I cried, and tried to leap out of bed ; but I was held down, and then gently told what had happened, how that the horses had taken fright and overturned the coach.

"There was not so much damage done as might have been expected ; young Talbot had gone on home with a broken arm ; the rest of the passengers had proceeded with the coach, shaken and bruised, but with no bones broken. But there was something more I wished to know—who was that I saw in the road with two children? whose shriek I had heard and still could hear ringing in my ears ; that news they tried to put off till another time ; but it would not do, I was determined to know. And I soon knew too much. It seemed a man with whom I was well acquainted, had been taking some of his family a walk in the cool of the evening. He was a man respected by all who knew him. And in a moment we were upon him as we turned the road, and giving him only time to scream, he lay in the dust—bruised—bleeding—dead.

"It was but the work of a minute to dress and hasten down stairs, determined to see the family of the poor man. His cottage was not far from my home, and I was soon there, but what a sight ! The blinds were drawn down in every window, but the bright sun was shining outside, and the early flowers were studding the garden which led up to the door. I entered the house. There, hushed into stillness by so great a calamity, were the six children whom I had defrauded of a parent ; as I entered, each eye was turned upon me ; they looked more in sorrow than in anger, but their wan cheeks, blanched by a sudden sorrow, made the strong man quail.

"In the chamber above, the dead man lay, calm and white, he was washed and laid out ready for the coroner's duty. His wife sat upon a chair by the bedside weeping and rocking herself backwards and forwards ; all you could hear were her sobs, and now and then, 'John, my poor John ! And I had been the cause of all this ; had I been sober—but drink, that cursed drink !

"I was not at the coroner's inquest, for that and many months went by before I knew anything, or anyone ; summer had mellowed into autumn, and the snows of winter had found me insensible to anything going on in the world. I had received a severe blow on the head in the overturning of the coach, and that with the great quantity of rum to one who drank but little, added to the self-condemnation which I heaped upon myself, when I saw that mourner and her helpless little ones, had been too much for my brain. But how had I got out of my bed after such a severe fall ? Why by will—a strong, determined will, which would almost in such circumstances trample upon impossibilities. But one had carefully tended me during that long time, and often had she (my wife) to bear with me, when in the silent watches of the night, I had heaped curse upon curse upon my own head for the wrong I had done. But no one had heard me but her ; she had carefully guarded me, so that no one should know my secret.

"And when I came once more into the open air, with halting gait and hair prematurely grey, she it was whose arm upheld me ; it was her voice who sung to me and cheered me, and although another had occupied my place on the Liverpool coach—she it was who read the story of the ravens