

the delight of a mother over her first-born child. Is it so, Mark Burton? or is your heart still cold and callous as the nether millstone? Look at Helen and your children—look at your devoted wife, whose heart, still unchanged, burns with an affection for you which all your neglect and wicked conduct have not quenched.”

The poor drunkard was touched. “Helen,” he said, “my poor Helen, forgive me. I am suffering under the horrors of a dark despair, and, when too late, I see the dreadful condition to which I have reduced myself and family. I—I deserve it all; but you—you and my innocent children—the thought is madness! *O that I had never tasted the poisoned cup!*”

Poor Helen wept for joy; for to the voice of kindness from her once fond and affectionate husband she had long been a stranger. Truly the cup of strong drink is a poisoned cup; it destroys the affections, and almost, if not altogether, obliterates the common feelings of humanity. In accents the most gentle and affectionate she said, “O Mark! O my dear husband! I forgive you all; and may you receive forgiveness from God. May he yet spare you to be a comfort and help to your family.” “I feel that my worthless life is near a close,” said Mark Burton; “there is a sad sinking within me; it is like the breaking up of the framework of nature. Helen, I cannot leave you to a world that will use you worse than you have been used by your own wicked husband. What an awful reflection is this for a dying man! I dare not, I cannot hope for mercy from him against whom I have so deeply offended. Oh, the misery of a life of dissipation, and the tenfold misery of a dying hour! Would to God I had remained satisfied with the pure and simple pleasures of domestic life at *Lindisburn!* O tell my children to avoid the beginnings of evil.”

“Mark-Burton,” said Maria Moreland, “you have snapped the thread of your own life asunder: your sun is going down ere you have reached the meridian of life, and it may set in gloom—in gloom dark and murky as the forest at midnight; but I tell you again, that the cross is the polar star by which the sinner tracks his weary way. I tell you that the gospel is an arm which reaches down into the deepest and darkest pit of guilt and misery, to draw the despairing victim forth. You deserve nothing at the hand of God, Mark Burton, nor do I, nor any of his creatures; but see that ye despise not his mercy, for he proclaims forgiveness to the chief of sinners through the blood of Jesus his well-beloved. Dost thou repent of thy wickedness? Dost thou feel that God has borne much and *log* with you? Dost thou know that even now, at the eleventh hour, he is giving thee space for repentance, and sounding in thy ears, *‘He that believeth shall be saved,’*—saved from the horrors of that everlasting condemnation, ‘where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched? I do not palliate thy sins; they are great and manifold. I do not teach thee to think lightly of thy iniquity; it is like the crimson flood; but I tell you that the mercy of God, in Jesus, is higher than heaven, deeper than hell. Look unto him, for he is Jehovah, and there is none else. The help of man fails: O may you know that God ‘would not that any should perish, but that all should turn unto him and live.’”

Another deep groan from the unhappy man told the sad conflict which was going on within. “I cannot hope,” he said; “I dare not hope. My life has been for years a life of awful wickedness, and of indescribable misery. I see nothing in it on which I can rest for a moment.”

“There is nothing in man or in nature on which man can rest his hope for eternity,” said Maria Moreland: “the hope which is founded on vanity must perish when the vanity passeth away; but the hope which is fixed and settled on that work which Jesus accomplished upon the cross, when he said, ‘It is finished,’ shall end in joyful and everlasting fruition. Look away from self, and while sorrow presses upon your mind, and guilt upon your conscience, and dark despair threatens to overwhelm and destroy you, look, look, I beseech you, to him who is higher than the highest, whose name is love, and who never said to any of the seed of Jacob, ‘Seek ye my face in vain.’ Mark Burton, Jesus died for sinners. To the man, who, like you, has sinned ‘as with a cart-ropes,’ and to the most moral and reputable, the message of mercy and forgiveness is couched in the same language, that no flesh may glory in his presence, but Christ be all in all.”

There was now silence. I rose from my seat and rapped gently at the door. It was opened by Maria, who said to me, “There is a change for the better here, Sir; I wish it were a change for the better in regard to the things of eternity.” Maria Moreland left the room, and I sat down at the bedside of the dying drunkard. After a few moments’ silence I said to him, “Your situation, and the situation of your poor family, is distressing. What could induce a man, moving in the circle in which you have moved, so far to forget himself, and every honourable and moral feeling, as to sink down into the condition, and take up the character and practices of a low and debased drunkard?”

Mark Burton looked at me with a countenance of inexpressible misery, and replied, “Sir, I fell by degrees, and my fall commenced in my own house. Always social and hospitable, I felt great pleasure in the company of my friends. The custom of my country made drinking a necessary adjunct to every evening party, and I was not aware that, in thus keeping up the spirit of hospitality, I was fostering a habit which would ultimately waste my property, ruin my family, and eat, as doth a canker, into my own vitals.” I continued: “Your conduct has indeed brought sad and awful ruin upon yourself and family; and yet, amidst it all, your poor wife seems an example of patient resignation. Have you wasted all your property? Is there nothing left, either of your own or your wife’s, for these children?” “Nothing!” he answered; “nothing!—not even the consolation that their father lived and died an honest, respectable man. Five thousand pounds was the fortune of Helen Blair, my once-beloved Helen. It is gone: and Lindisburn, the inheritance of my fathers, and what ought to have been the inheritance of these children, is gone also. O the curse which follows in the track of the drunkard! It leaves nothing for those who come after, and it scatters all around it debasement, misery, want, and death. I am, and have been for years, truly miserable, and yet