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The Favourite Child.

(Continued from 355.)

On Mr. Ainsworth's return from the city, he was, of course, extremely sorry to find his wife so ill; but warm water, he said, was his certain remedy for all disorders of the stomach, and "Drink plentifully of warm water," was his often-repeated recommendation; always seconded by his daughter, with this addition, "that the patient should eat nothing for two or three days."

It is needless to say that Betsy and her mistress had different notions about the cure of spasm, upon which they acted in the present instance to the extent of their ability. This ability, however, was daily on the decrease; for Mrs. Ainsworth's weekly allowance seemed less and less capable of satisfying her wishes; the sum she owed her maid was beginning to be a very serious one, and that maid was herself less accommodating, less kind, than she had formerly been, and certainly less interested in the happiness of her mistress.

Amongst the many temporary expedients, which under these circumstances presented themselves to the mind of Mrs. Ainsworth, she selected that of requesting either to have possession of the household keys herself, or to have duplicates of them; and the latter proposal was agreed to, as being a right which the mistress of the house had power to claim.

Had the cellar and the store-room of Mr. Ainsworth been as scantily supplied as his daily board, Isabel might have passed in and out unharmed; but, unfortunately for her, here were the choice wines, the liqueurs, the cordials, and the good things of every description, upon which her husband prided himself in the entertainment of his guests: here, in short, was all, and even more than Isabel had been accustomed to enjoy in her mother's house; and she had free access to it all, and was, in reality, the lawful mistress of it. Here, then, on those rare occasions when the family found time to go from home, she used to come, and examine labels, and taste, and try, and take away with her what she thought would be most useful in this or that emergency: until, in time, the vacant places left behind began to look rather wide and numerous; and still she trusted, that from such plenty, the seeming little she extracted never would be missed.

There is nothing so greedy, nothing so uncalculating as intemperance. Mrs. Ainsworth knew perfectly well all the time, if she would but have allowed herself to acknowledge it, that her husband was strict in keeping his household accounts, even to the minutest item; that his daughter followed up the same system; and that, if even for awhile they might both be too much engaged to observe the depredations committed upon their private store, a day of reckoning must come, and come with no pleasant consequences to her; and still she went on; for each separate addition made to what she called her necessary comforts, was in itself so small as to excite no immediate alarm; and as to the day of reckoning, she drove it from her mind, with many other uncomfortable thoughts, by fresh application to those cordial draughts which seemed at once to exhilarate and to soothe.

One cause of uneasiness was, that Betsy became almost necessarily acquainted with all that went on; she had even been occasionally entrusted with the keys; and, contrary

to the promise made on receiving them, had been permitted, unaccompanied by any witness, to penetrate within those folded doors, which no unsanctioned steps had ever passed before.

Isabel Ainsworth had never, until after her marriage, been guilty of what the world calls intemperance; surrounded by those whose constant care it was to administer to all her wants, who left no wish ungratified, and never permitted her to feel a moment's pain without some attempt at alleviation, she had been accustomed merely to lull herself into a kind of waking dream, by a succession of stimulants, chiefly in the form of medicine—under which head were included every variety of tonics, tinctures, and restoratives, with soothing draughts and cordials, sufficient, if one might have believed their printed recommendations, to cure every evil under the sun.

If such be the pampered state of the body, while the mind is at ease, and all goes on prosperously, it is not difficult to imagine to what degree of excess these indulgences must lead when dark days of trouble and anxiety succeed this transient calm—when flattering attentions fall away—when the kind voice of affection is no longer heard—when pleasure wanes, and cheerfulness expires, and the heart begins to ache with its load of daily grief. Add to all this, some gnawing anxiety, some secret torment, and, what was once the mere want of the body, becomes the craving of the mind; what was once a momentary consolation, becomes a poison, greedily devoured; what was once a habit, sanctioned by society, becomes a vice, from which the nearest and the dearest turn away with horror and disgust.

Isabel had passed rapidly on towards this stage of her disease since her marriage; for the general, and, to her, appalling discomfort of her situation, rendered it an object of the first importance to forget herself as much and as often as she could.

This object she had for some time been accomplishing to her heart's contents, going just as far as decorum, or rather the fear of detection, would permit, when Mr. Ainsworth, having one evening expressed a wish to speak with her alone, she accompanied him to his own room, not without a sensible, nay, almost an audible palpitation of the heart: a disease to which all persons guilty of deception are liable, when summoned to a private audience with those whom they have deceived.

Mr. Ainsworth's look and manner on this occasion were fraught with interest; his eyes twinkled with intelligence, and his very person appeared magnified by the importance of his object. There was, however, so little of wrath or indignation in his manner of addressing his wife, that she took courage, and seated herself before him with tolerable composure.

There is a class of persons who seem almost better pleased to have discovered an evil than not to have had one committed, even against themselves. Of this class was Mr. Ainsworth; and sorry as he would otherwise have been to lose even the minutest fraction of his worldly substance, yet the exercise of what he considered his peculiar cleverness in the detection of a thief, went far towards consoling him for the loss he had sustained.

On the present occasion it seemed really to be a gratification to him to state the variety and the amount of articles