

TEMPERANCE ADVOCATE,

DEVOTED TO

TEMPERANCE, EDUCATION, AGRICULTURE, NEWS, &c.

VOL. XIV.

MONTREAL, APRIL 1, 1848.

No. 7.

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STEPS TO RUIN.

BY MRS. JANE C. CAMPBELL.

James Boynton was the first born of his parents, and a good and happy mother was Mrs. Boynton, when her friends gathered around her to look at her pretty babe. Carefully he tended, and all his infantile winning ways were measured as so many proofs of his powers of endearment.

His wisdom has the Almighty hidden the deep secrets of life from mortal ken. When the mother first folds her arms about her child, could she look through the long vista of years, and see the suffering, the sin, the shame, which may be the portion of her child, would she not ask God in mercy to take the infant to himself? Would she not unrepiningly, thankfully, bear all the agony of seeing her little one, with straightened limbs, and folded hands, and shrouded face, carried from her bosom to its baby grave? And yet, how many of all the thousands who are steeped in wickedness and crime, but a mother's heart has gladdened when the mother's eye first looked into hers, and the soft cheek first nestled on her own. And—still more awful thought!—not one of all these Pariahs of society but has an immortal soul, to which the Son of God left his glory, and agonised upon the cross!

James grew up a warm-hearted boy, and among his young companions he was a universal favourite. "Jim Boynton is so good-natured to refuse doing anything we ask," said one of his friends. One day to a schoolfellow who feared that James would not join a party of rather doubtful character, which was forming for what they called a frolic. And this was the truth. Here lay the secret of Boynton's weakness. He was too good natured: for this very desirable and truly valuable quality, unless united with firmness of character, is the productive of evil. But we pass over his boyish life, and look at him in early manhood.

He has a fine figure, with a handsome, intelligent countenance; and his manners have received their tone and polish from the free intercourse in refined circles. He passed his college examination with credit to himself; but, from sheer

indecision of character, hesitated in choosing a profession. At this time, an uncle, who resided at the south, was about retiring from mercantile life, and he proposed a wish that James should enter with him as a junior partner, while he would remain for a year or two to give his nephew the benefit of his experience. The business was a lucrative one, and the proposal was accepted.

James left his home at the north, and went to try his fortunes amid new scenes and new temptations. His uncle received him warmly, for the old man had no children of his own, and James was his good child. His uncle's position in society, and his own frank and gentlemanly demeanour, won him ready access to the hospitality of southern friends, and it was not long before he fell in love with a pretty orphan girl, whom he frequently met at the house of a common acquaintance. That the girl was portionless, was no demerit in his uncle's eyes. Not all his treasures, and they were large, had choked the avenues to the old man's heart, and the young people were made happy by his approval of their union.

After a visit to his friends in the north, James returned with his bride; and in a modern house, furnished with luxury, the happy pair began their wedded life. And now, who so blest as Boynton? Three years pass away, and two children make their home still brighter. Does no one see the cloud, "not bigger than a man's hand," upon the verge of the moral horizon?

Boynton's dislike to saying "no," when asked to join a few male friends at dinner, or on a party of pleasure; his very good nature, which made him so desirable a companion, were the means of leading him in the steps to ruin.

"Come, Boynton, another glass."

"Excuse me, my dear fellow, I have really taken too much already."

"Nonsense! it is the parting glass, you must take it."

And Boynton, wanting in firmness of character, yielded to the voice of the tempter. Need we say, that, with indulgence, the love for the poison was strengthened?

For a while the unfortunate man strove to keep up appearances. He was never seen during the day in a state of intoxication; and from a doze on the sofa in the evening, or a heavy lethargic sleep at night, he could awake to converse with his friends, or attend at his counting room, without his secret habit being at all suspected.

But who that willingly dallies with temptation can foretell the end? Who can "lay the flattering unction to his soul," that in a downward path he can stop when he pleases, and unharmed retrace his steps? Like the moth, circling nearer and still nearer to the flame, until the insect falls with scorched wing a victim to its own temerity, so will the pinions of the soul be left scathed and drooping.

Soon Boynton began to neglect his business, and he was secretly pointed out as a man of intemperate habits. At last he was shunned, shaken off by the very men who had led him astray. Who were most guilty? Let Heaven judge.

Here let us pause, and ask, why is it that so many look upon a fellow-being verging to the brink of ruin, without speaking one persuasive word, or doing one kindly act, to