

Our Home

Vol. IV. No. 3.

MONTREAL, APRIL, 1896.

25 Cents a Year.



BROKEN COIN.

MARIE WALSH.

In the underground chamber of a house, situated in the most crowded part of Bloomsbury, a woman lay dying.

The keen March wind whistled through the narrow grating in the pavement, over the window, as arranged as to let in a limited allowance of light and air; yet the room, barely furnished and cheerless as it was, had been her home for the past five years. There she had lived and toiled to support herself and child since the time when he, who had vowed before God's altar to love and cherish her, had proven false to his vow, and left her to face the world alone.

At best, hers had been a wearisome lot; and now that toil and care had hastened her end, she felt but few regrets to leave a world so full of misery. She had worked to the last, eager to support her helpless child; and even now an unfinished garment hung upon a chair, where it had fallen from her weak hand, as the faintness of death stole over her. Her dull eyes gazed longingly upon it as she remembered it would bring means wherewith to satisfy the hunger of her child, whose tear-stained face rested fondly against his mother's breast, as, tired with crying, he had fallen asleep.

A glimmer of sunshine crept through the dust-lined window across the bright curls of the sleeping boy, and flitting softly over the woman's features, revealed all too clearly the ravages of disease. Sabbath bells were ringing, calling worshippers to the house of prayer. Warmly clad men and women passed over the grating in the pavement, unconscious of the tragedy enacted beneath, in which lay there dying alone; the grim actors; and the woman lay there dying alone; no friend to pity; no human hand to soothe the final struggle; only a little child, unable to realize the presence of the dread messenger. Happily all fears for her darling's future—fears that for months had stolen her peace of mind by day and disturbed her rest by night—were banished, as she neared her rest. Her intense faith took the keen edge off the sorrow of their separation, and a smile rested on her lips, as with a fond effort to caress her child she committed him to Heaven's mercy, and then her spirit fled, while the sunbeam fell silently upon the still features of the dead.

Was it the sudden silence that disturbed the sleeping child? Maybe it was; for the blue eyes opened with a look of fear, caused by the sudden consciousness of solitude, so dreadful to a little one. Turning to gaze into the face that ever wore a smile for him, its strange and deathly aspect frightened him, and rushing to the door he screamed with terror.

Presently help drew near; a few neighbors, shocked that the poor creature had passed away unattended, hastened to perform the last sad services and console the weeping child. There was one welcome face among that pitying throng to whom little Ernie turn-

ed with confidence—the superintendent of the ragged school where the child had spent many a pleasant hour; a man small of stature and frail in body, yet whose heart was large enough to pity and relieve thousands of homeless, destitute little ones; a man whose constant association with poverty and distress in their saddest form had tinged his demeanor with a seriousness often misunderstood; but Ernie clung to him, and looking with confidence into those keen eyes that could beam with tenderness and pity, knew that he had found a friend.

The work of the "National Refuge for Destitute Children" was then in its infancy, and there were more homeless claimants seeking admission than the young society could accommodate; but this poor orphaned boy, so helpless, so desolate, crept into the heart of William Williams, the devoted superintendent of the ragged school, whose philanthropic efforts to rescue the waifs of misfortune had already attracted the sympathies of not a few Christian workers, and with the child's hand in his the good man led him to a plain but homelike building that had proved a refuge to many others as poor, as unfortunate, as little motherless Ernie.

A lad stood on the deck of an Atlantic steamer gazing fearfully at the receding shores of old England, one of a band of youthful emigrants destined for Canada, anxious and determined to win success in his chosen home; yet he could not restrain the natural regret at leaving his motherland. True, that on the parting day, when weeping mothers and friends were assembled to bid adieu to other lads, there had been no one to shed a farewell tear for him. Alone he had stood in the reception room observing the small groups, in each of which one of his comrades was the central figure; and oh! how he had longed for the touch of a friendly hand. He was leaving the only home he had known for years, and a sob rose in his throat as he wished that he also had some one who felt sorry to part from him.

As if in answer to that unspoken wish, he felt a gentle touch upon the shoulder, and turning, met the gaze of Mr. Williams, who amidst his innumerable engagements found time to spend a few moments with the lonely boy. The Institution had grown into importance since the day when Ernie Walters first found refuge there. Many wealthy patrons devoted their means and influence to promote so laudable an endeavor. Chief among these was the good Earl Shaftesbury, who to the last day of his life remained a prominent figure in this good movement.

Standing on the ocean bound steamer, looking his last upon the old land, Ernie felt he could never forget the words of counsel that fell from the lips of his friend and guardian. Musing thus, he wondered if he would ever meet his unknown father; or how it could be possible to make any effort in that direction; for there was no proof found in the room where his mother died that would serve to identify him—nothing save her bible and a few trifling and valueless trinkets.

"Homesick already?" inquired a gentleman who had been watching Ernie.

"A little, sir," answered the lad, looking up briskly. "I was just thinking over the parting advice given me by my best friend."

"I am sure it was good advice," remarked the stranger.

"Indeed it was," replied Ernie; "and I hope to prove worthy of his training." Then in a burst of confidence Ernie told of his life in the home at Bisleigh; of the care that had been bestowed upon him; and of his hopes for the future in the new land.

This was the first of many friendly chats; and ere the ship had reached her destination, Mr. Gray had expressed a desire to engage the boy in his own service. It was a fine opening for Ernie, for that gentleman was a well-known Canadian merchant, and the agent gladly intrusted the young emigrant to his care. Nor did Mr. Gray ever find his trust misplaced.

From one position of responsibility to another Ernie passed; and ere he reached his twentieth year his employer (who was not blessed with family ties) offered to adopt him as his son. Few boys would fail to appreciate such an offer; but the youth was moved to accept it, not so much from pecuniary motives, as from a disinterested affection for his benefactor.

The lonesome man had won the boy's love. It came like a ray of sunshine into his gloomy life, despite his wealth; and he counted such genuine friendship worth a far greater price than he could offer. Indeed, the advantages were not all on Ernie's side. The merchant's luxuriant home was less lonely when brightened by the boy's presence; and the hours that were before so dull and monotonous glided pleasantly along, as they engaged in harmless amusements or in deeds of kindness.

Years passed. Mr. Gray was growing feeble, less capable of engaging in the perplexities of business, and gradually all responsibility was placed in the hands of his adopted son. Many of their acquaintances wondered why Ernest did not make a home for himself; but they might have spared themselves all anxiety on his behalf, as he was perfectly content to dwell with his father, who each year seemed to lean more entirely upon his guidance and judgment.

The first month of 1892, in England, has well been called the "black month," for during its reign death bore hence many a noble soul whom this sorrow-laden world could ill afford to lose. It plucked the Royal House of England into mourning; and laid its icy hand on many whose exertions on behalf of suffering humanity were tireless.

Among them was the good Cardinal Manning, whose aid and influence in every work of social reform was surely felt and valued. Charles Spurgeon, the eloquent preacher, who from boyhood had faithfully declared the tidings of salvation, and whose strong arm had been bent in many an effort to break down the barriers to moral purity, was also summoned to rest from his labors,—to leave the weapons of warfare to other and younger men. Among those not the least known there passed away the founder of the National Refuge that had sheltered and reared thousands of destitute little ones, who, but for its protection, would have been left to drift on the sea of life, and perchance to become wrecks upon the rocks of temptation.

Many a heart in Canada mourned his loss, but none more sincerely than Ernest Gray. During the past years the philanthropist and he had kept up a regular correspondence, for the successful business man was too loyal ever to forget the friend of his early days. Mr. Gray's health was also failing, and realizing that soon he, too, must leave the things of earth behind, he resolved to speak with Ernest concerning certain events in his past life that as yet he had not revealed to anyone.

"I desire to place a responsibility upon you," he said; "and although it may seriously alter your prospects, I believe you will be true to my trust."

"I will!" promised the younger man, careless of