

## Tales and Sketches.

## ONE WAY TO REFORM, OR AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

A TRUE STORY.

The Rev. Mr. Keen had nearly completed his regular week's work, his next sermon was mapped out and he had pushed aside his papers at nine o'clock in the evening, and wheeled his lounge in front of the smouldering fire to enjoy an hour's reverie before retiring.

In came his neat and pretty wife with her quiet, busy ways; she brushed up the scattered ashes, gave the charred log a poke and a rap with the tongs, and then picked up the ends daintily, building a latticed pile over the glowing coals through which the bright tongues of flame began to play.

"Come," said the gentle-toned husband, "I want you to help me out with a hard question," and his black eyes deepened and his cheeks flushed with emotion. He was young, not so young as he looked, but earnest, and he knew that his wife was wiser than her youthful air warranted, so there she sat down by him in the closeness of their sympathy to listen and help him out.

"I have been thinking all day, Annie, of Baxter, the lawyer. They say he is drinking himself to death in his study at home, and that his wife and boy have had to leave him there alone; she has gone out of town and sent the boy to his aunt's."

"How could she do that, Bert? I cannot imagine such a desertion. She looks so kind and good, and is a Christian, isn't she? She is a thoroughly ladylike woman in her appearance, but she must be terribly selfish?"

"I don't know about that, Annie. I am told she has stood by him through evil report and poverty and harsh treatment for years, and now he has fairly driven her away and all hope seems to have fled. He is one of the most talented lawyers in the county, but has lately been running down very fast until he has become desperate, and says he is bound to kill himself with drink as soon as possible. He has looked threadbare for some time and his landlord has turned him out of his office, and I suppose his wife was unable to influence him, and took the boy out of the house that he might not witness any longer his father's degradation."

"How dreadful! why don't his friends interfere, and send him to an inebriate asylum, and provide for his wife and child, or put them in a way to support themselves? I should think that would be a good thing to do. Somebody ought to step in and adjust matters for them."

"Well, my dear wife, I have thought somebody ought to take it in hand, but now I am asking myself, why do I not take the responsibility myself?"

"But you don't even know Mr. Baxter, darling, do you? He doesn't belong to our congregation, and why should it devolve upon you? There are so many in the city who have known him for years, his brother lawyers, his old friends and neighbors, his minister and the people of his own church,—surely they ought not to desert him. I have heard that he is a finely educated gentleman, and might have distinguished himself. How terrible that this habit should have mastered him so completely! But really, Bert, there are others much more nearly accountable for him now than you. I hardly see how you could reach him."

"Yet there he sits, a wreck, stranded in the midst of a Christian city, and I sit, a Christian minister, pledged to seek and to save the lost, and I know of his despairing, dying condition. Is it for me to be inquiring whose parish he belongs to, or whether I have been introduced to him? If a man were sighted alone on Devil's Reef in a storm down the bay, who would stop to trump up excuses for leaving him to perish? No, my dear child, I will not delay, I must find him out to-morrow, and see what can be done. The Lord will show me what to do."

"My heart responds to your resolution, Bertie, and I would not have you throw aside your purpose. I would be glad to help you, if there is anything a woman can do in such a case. Don't be afraid to count on me, darling."

"No indeed, Annie, it will strengthen me wonderfully to feel that you are with me. Already I find my heart at rest in my resolution, and I believe that it is of God, though as yet I see not how the way will open. We will lay it before the Saviour's tender heart and wait for His whisper."

So hand in hand they knelt at the divine altar which left upon them every night and morning its benediction of peace and assurance, and the hours glided quietly by while they slumbered.

They slumbered, he only for a while, for his brain had not quite subsided from the pressure of this new responsibility. He awoke to a sense of what he had promised himself and God, and his heart trembled as its embarrassments and perplexities arose before him. What pretext had he for going to a man of that high-strung, proud reserve, and obtruding his presence, his opinions, his faith even? How should he meet the inevitable rebuff, the insulting taunt, the keen satire? How could he save a man who would not be saved? Even his faithful wife had been compelled to leave him, what chance would there be for him? Perhaps he had been a fool to think of it. The beaded drops stood upon his forehead as he

thought of it; his heart sank within him. He got up and glanced out of the window, the world was asleep; why should he not be at peace? But no, his restlessness grew deeper, throbs of agony shook him and he tried in vain to quell the tumult of his thoughts.

At last he partially dressed and left the chamber that he might not disturb his wife, and went down into the long parlor in his agitation, pacing the floor and renewing again and again the uncertain debate between his reason and his conscience. His tossing heart urged him on as he walked the length of his rooms, often renouncing the task as quixotic, then re-adopting it with its heavy weight of questions and vain effort to urge his shrinking heart to its demands.

At last, a voice seemed to break upon the discord. "Am I my brother's keeper?" That was Cain's excuse, no doubt now as to whether it should be his; he came to a stand and reined in the trembling fibres of his heart as he would have some fiery and unmanageable steed. He could no longer waver. His heart was fixed, his loins girt and he would trust in his God to lead him on to the accomplishment of his purpose. So he again laid him down in peace and slept and awoke the next morning as one who hails the light that he may apply himself to a welcome task.

"Now," said wise little Annie after breakfast, "if it is not officious, Bertie, let me tell you what I thought out early this morning before you awoke. I don't see but you will have to take possession of Mr. Baxter, as he is so left alone, and I advise you to get a carriage and get him into it and bring him right here and then I can nurse him and can reform him when we have snatched him out of the jaws of death. Of course he is sick and worn out, and if he stops drinking it will be some time before he can rally from the effects of his reckless course. I will get our pleasant room up stairs all ready and you just bring him home; we must have some careful diet for him, ask Dr. Stacy about it, but rely upon me, you can manage the case only by getting him into a safe home."

"Annie," said her husband with wet eyes, "how you have enlightened me! That is the right thing and we must try it. It was revealed to you by God's spirit, because you trusted in Him. I was awake for two hours in terror and doubt, wrestling with my conscience, until my craven heart was aroused by the answer of Cain, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' after that I was firm."

Within an hour from this talk in the cozy breakfast-room, our minister found himself at the door of the lawyer's house getting out of the carriage which was to wait for him to re-enter it with the wanderer on his way home. He rang the bell in vain twice, then after due delay opened the door and walked in; he hesitated but a moment and then tapped at the library door, which was closed. No answer, so he opened the door quickly and walked in with his hat in hand, saying, "My friend, I came to do what a man may for one who seems to need help. What can I do for you?"

A sudden flash in the haggard eye, and the astonished man rose suddenly, and with an oath and angry gesture called in faltering voice, "Who are you, and by what right do you intrude upon me?"

"I'm a Christian minister and it is my sacred business to search out such a desperate case as yours, my dear sir. I could not sit down at my fire-side in peace knowing why and with what intent you are here alone. I implore you, in the name of God, to come with me and receive such kind care as may restore, and hear of the love of Christ that shall save your soul."

"Let me alone. I am here to die and no one shall save either my soul or my body," and with the expression of a demon and blasphemous mutterings of passion, he sank exhausted into his seat.

"But I have a carriage outside and I shall not go without you. We will drive to my house and there you shall have a room, bed and good nursing. With God's help you shall be restored to life and manhood."

"Never. I will not start from this room for your cursed interference, so begone with your ——— impudent, pious meddling. I am not afraid to go to hell alone, ha-ha!" and an unearthly pallor overspread his thin face and doomed forehead as he tossed back his long hair and shook his quivering hand towards the intruder.

The dauntless servant of the Lord stepped close to him and held out his hand, then laying it upon his shoulder said firmly, "You must go with me. I would leave no brother man in such an extremity."

"But I tell you I will not, hands off. I can knock you down or put a bullet through your head. I am not too far gone for that. You dare not handle me."

"Now, Mr. Baxter, if it come to force, you see how easily I can master you. You shall ride with me to my home. You must be saved despite yourself. I shall not let you go. Come."

At this a tremor seized the forsaken man, tears rushed to his eyes, he yielded and allowed the rescuer to assist him to his coat and lead him to the door. A start of hesitation as he glanced at the undrained glass on the table and a fierce gesture overtook him, but the friendly grasp was too much for him, and before he knew it he was being helped up the staircase of the minister's sunny house, and then sank down into a soft chair, while tears rained down his wan cheeks and passive as a child he submitted himself to the kind services of his host. Soon he was comfortably in bed, hardly breathing from exhaustion, while the hot beef tea which had been