



Tales and Sketches.

RACHEL NOBLE'S EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER XX.

ACCORDING to intention, Fanny and I turned out one evening, to call on our old servant, Sarah. We chose the evening for our visit, as we wished to see her husband as well as herself. Their house was in a quiet, little by-street, one of the undermost flats of a big "land" of houses; the windows looked into the street, and came pretty close down to the ground. Groups of children were playing about. When we came to Sarah's windows, a crowd of them were gathered round, and two or three boys taller than the rest were flattening their noses against the glass, looking in over the short blinds, the colour of which showed that they had not been changed for a very long time. "They're fechtin' again, and she's cryin' murder," said one of the biggest boys as we approached. "Here's a go—he's lickin' her; it's time the police was here."

world of meaning is compressed into these three simple words, anguish, remorse, memories, which hardly time itself shall blot out—he found that he was in prison for assaulting his wife, and that if the feeble life which flickered in her bruised and battered body went out, he would have to stand his trial for murder, with the full consciousness that he was guilty. Shame, terror, and a delirious anxiety to live took possession of Sarah when she came to herself—and she did live; very slowly she recovered, but she did recover. Her husband was tried for the minor offence, and all extenuating circumstances being dwelt upon, and many witnesses coming forward to testify to his general good conduct, he escaped with the very lenient punishment of six months imprisonment. Shortly after, another man was tried in very similar circumstances, only, in this case the unfortunate woman was killed; he was condemned to die, and although every effort was made to get the sentence remitted, it was carried into effect, and that on the very morning of the day Thomas and Sarah met once more on their own hearth-stone. I think if they ever felt that they had been suspended over an abyss by a single strand of cord it was then. How they met, or what they said, I do not know, but that was the turning-point of their lives; they agreed never more to touch intoxicating drink, and they kept the resolution, and have lived down the memory of that terrible time, in most minds but their own. This affair also brought things to a crisis with George Myles—he must give up his present business, he said, even if he should take his old place at the back of the omnibus. And he did give it up. He came to Honeycomb House. I did not thank him for involving me in such a disagreeable scene, and he acknowledged that it was not fair, but he wished to have what shelter my presence could give him—gave up to Mr. Morgan the shop, the stock, and the business, explaining as mildly as he could his reasons for doing so. It was some time before Mr. Morgan took in his meaning; then he said in a quiet, cool way, like the soft notes that prelude the tempest, "Conscience—did you say conscience?" "Yes."

ther than George of Denmark, although the former had to provide for his family, and projected opening a small shop in the provision line? PORTER AND GUTTA PERCHA. RECORDED BY CRYSTAL FOUNTAIN ESQ. Condensed by JACOB SPENCE. JOHN BLANK was in the habit of sitting out the evening over his porter, in an arm chair before the fire of a country inn kept by Mrs. Doublestrong. John was one of those persons who had often wondered what the world would be without drink, especially without porter. As might be expected John had a great dread of teetotalism in its various forms. And many a time the dreadful enquiry forced itself on his bewildered imagination,—should that terrible time come, in his time, when no porter is to be had. What a state of existence! John being often absent from home, and being a little absent in mind through the porter, he found himself on one occasion in a very strange place. The weather felt awfully hot, and he wandered up and down till far in the afternoon searching for a public house, but all in vain. At last he fell on a signboard with "Refreshments sold here" painted on it in large characters. This is it at last, thought he, to his great relief, and he accordingly stepped, into what seemed the public room, forthwith ringing the bell. A decent looking man appeared, whom he took to be the publican, only his face had no red marks, and he hadn't the slightest smell of whiskey. "I want," said John (throwing himself down quite exhausted on the seat), "some of your best porter." The landlord pleasantly bowed and retired. "Jim!" said he to a smart boy, "here's a customer wants the best porter. Call Saunders Heavylift." Off ran the boy and shortly returned with Saunders. "Here's the porter," said the landlord introducing Mr. Heavylift. John whose eyes were half shut, and even thought the short time long, looked up expecting to see a black bottle with waxed cork XXX, and best London, a screw and tumbler before him on the table. Bewildered, seeing only the landlord and Saunders, he stared a little and exclaimed—"Where?" "Here" replied the landlord, pointing to Saunders Heavylift, "Here he is—a stout honest man you'll find him. I assure you sir, he'll carry luggage with the best in the town. Just give him your instructions, and I'll be responsible. John stared and gaped, first at the landlord then at the porter. Both seemed to feel embarrassed. At length he found breath to say, "It's not him I want; it's porter to drink, I mean." "Ye want drink, sir," said the landlord. Dear me, if that's it you'll have it this instant, sir." Saunders left the room rather disappointed, and Jim was despatched to fill the pitcher. This was soon done, and a glass of sparkling cool water presented to John by the landlord, who observed as he filled it out, "It keeps a short time cool in this hot weather, so we just get it fresh from the pump." John's patience already much tried, found this quite unendurable. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "I want porter. Have you no porter?" "Surely," interposed the landlord calmly "sir, that we have, Saunders has been here a minute since—the best at the station; but you can have some other if you prefer," said the landlord not knowing what to think, and within a hair of being nettled at this strange customer. "Were you intending to go by the first train," enquired the landlord in a milder tone, "because it's just about the start; the porter however, can take you by a short cut." "Short cut!" cried John. What do I want with a short cut? Do you not understand? Are you mad? Is this a public house? tell me that. What does all this mean? Are you the landlord? Can I not get Porter?" "Public house—yes, I think so," replied the landlord. "Public enough; at least I always make the public welcome, and have both good beds and good provisions for them when they come." "Provisions!" echoed John, scornfully. Why don't you keep porter?" "We cannot afford to keep one ourselves, but there are always plenty within call at the station for our customers," said the landlord as meekly as he could. "Do you mean to make a fool of me," says

John. "Is this how you treat customers? I've been four and forty years a man and a boy, and never landlord dared to make fun of me up to this hour—not even Tam Toddy, who used to play tricks on others, and who often said rather than lose my custom, he would pay the porter himself." "Every gentleman pays his own porter here," retorted the landlord, who was a sturdy man standing too on his own dignity, and felt now not a little indignant at his visitor. "Certainly," says John, and so will I when I am served." "I cannot serve you better," replied the landlord, quite out of temper, "so that's the short and the long of it. If Mr. Heavylift don't please, you may find one if you will; but my time must not be taken up talking with a man that will neither hear rhyme nor reason. There's a carriage at the door to which I must attend." So saying the irate host left the room slamming the door behind him. John was sorely puzzled; and though very angry was still more thirsty, that of his throat exceeding that of his temper. Then thinking he had perhaps been too rash, and that the landlord might possibly be a peculiar sort of person to deal with, he resolved to change his tone, and try him again in a calmer sort of way. So upon the return of the landlord whose good humor too seemed restored by the interlude of the carriage. John began soothingly, "Well landlord, I was I acknowledge, a little hot just now, but think of it; I have walked up and down the whole of this long day, and this is the first public I've lighted on. I'm perfectly choking," and this clammy utterance confirmed his assertion. "Now tell me seriously, is it a fact that ye have no porter to drink?" This being delivered in the most insinuating tones, Mr. Crystal who was by this time thoroughly convinced that his guest had a bee in his bonnet, and that he had better speak to him fair, replied soothingly—"Drink! ay, and eat too, if you like." "Eat!" cried John in amazement. "Ay—eat!" rejoined Mr. Crystal. "And, if ye had to find them as I have to do, you would know whether they eat or not. And let me say 't's my opinion that a drink and some refreshment is what you need after your long journey." "Refreshment!" roared John, in a rage and despair. "Am I not asking the porter to refresh me?" "Hoot, sit down, sir," said Mr. Crystal, coaxingly. "We'll refresh you without the porter. Just let me know what you would like to eat first. We'll have it ready in a crack for you." At this John's patience being totally exhausted, and the dryness of his throat past endurance, he rushed on Mr. Crystal, exclaiming "Crack! I'll crack you in a twinkling!" Attracted by the noise entered Saunders and others, and the hue and cry was raised in the village that a man from the madhouse had come to Peter Crystal's: had flown fiercely on Peter, and nearly killed him. This, however, was not more than half true, for Peter had only fallen over some chairs, and was scarcely a hair the worse. But as it was now clear to all present that John was mad, they at once assisted in getting his legs and arms strapped down on the sofa. It was all in-vain that he cried out he was not mad—that he knew what he was doing—that he only enquired civilly for some porter, when they insulted him by bringing a hanger on at the trains, and tried to fool him about a porter; he had only asked for some good porter, and they had sent him a fellow with a rope over his shoulder. However it was in vain he kicked and struggled. The danger of his being at large was only the more fully confirmed. A watch was set over him and the doctor summoned. The sight of this functionary so enraged John beyond all bounds, that he broke into the more indignant exclamations—"O! that the like of this should happen to a man in a free country and in the nineteenth century. Surely the dreadful time \* \* hasn't yet arrived?" "Hear that," said Mr. Crystal—the time hasn't yet arrived. The poor man's time is out of date." "What time can he mean?" said Saunders. The patient grew red in the face. His eyes were like to leap from their sockets. The doctor declared the case a serious one and ordered them if the paroxysms continued, to first

blister his feet, then closely watch the symptoms and report particularly any special development of the delirium. John gnashed his teeth and yelled. This was clear evidence of confirmed unfavorable development of the disorder. John entreated to be set free just for one moment, but they knew better than to do this. "Gently sooth him," said the doctor; keep him quiet—quiet; give him any innocent thing he asks, and avoid all excitement; keep him quiet—quiet." Soon with pure fatigue and despair the unhappy man became comparatively passive, breathing at intervals such exclamations as—"O! for one mug of porter!—O! for one glass!" "He wants a glass," cried Mr. Crystal. "Bring here the water." The sight of the tumbler, revived the patient's wrath. He looked more fiercely at mine host, who seeing he rejected this with horror called out to bring the looking-glass from the back parlour—perhaps it was that he meant—"for," said he, calling to mind the doctor's instructions, "we were ordered to let him have, any innocent thing" he wanted." The mirror was brought and forthwith held before him, "Villains!" cried John, as he caught a glimpse of his own ghastly visage. "Kill me at once! put me out of pain! and has it come to this? O! if my right hand were but loose, or if I had one glass of Mrs. Doublestrong's spirits to give me strength!" As he uttered these words, Saunders Heavylift and Mrs. Chrystal entered the room, followed in a few minutes by the medical adviser. Mr. Crystal duly reported all particulars concerning his guest, detailing minutely all that happened since he last saw him, and how he had taken Saunders and Mrs. Crystal for "spirits when they had entered the room." "He's far gone, I doubt," said the man of skill. "I doubt it," said Mr. Crystal. "But we must see what can be accomplished," said Mr. Leech. I think we must just blister and bleed, so as to reduce the inflammation, and quiet the brain. He is too full of blood. Look at his face; the veins are bursting. And so they were for John lay in helpless indignation, his eyes gleaming fur on all around. "Let me go, or I'll run mad!" shrieked he. "Let me up—I say—let me up!" "Poor man, he doesn't need to run mad!" said Mrs. Chrystal, with a sigh. "I wonder if he has a wife? and O, pity on his family! I wish my house were well quit of him at anyrate. It's perfectly awful this, isn't it?" "Nothing else for it at present," interposed Mr. Leech, "but apply the blister to the soles of his feet at once. Come, Saunders you hold his feet steady; here it is. How he does kick!" In spite of roars and menaces the blister was applied. In a little time John felt a stinging burning sensation all over the soles of his feet, especially one of them. It became so sharp, that he could endure it no longer. Agony inspired strength, so that rising with one prodigious jerk he awoke to find he had just tumbled off the chair in Mrs. Doublestrong's backroom, where he had been perpetrating a fit of nightmare for the last half hour, his gutta percha soles melting off, and his right foot slowly roasting in front of the now blazing fire which Mrs. Doublestrong had just been stirring up briskly. John has not been known to drink porter since the experience related. His wife has hopes of him the next time he was carefully nursing his burnt foot, one of the little Blanks on his knee, and the mother singing the following song made for the occasion:— Pure water is the drink for man, And flows through every nation; First Heaven prepared, when time began, To serve each generation. (Chorus—in which the children joined.) Then who would think of Malted drink, And its delicious joys O! Since water's pure, and clean, and sure, And best for girls and boys O! It flows in rills, from ancient hills, It glitters 'mong the mountains; But whiskey comes from filthy stills, O! how unlike bright fountains. Then who would think of ardent drink, And its delicious joys O! Since water's pure, and cheap and sure, And best for girls and boys O!