

"I could have borne his blows," she said, "but when he—my husband!—wanted me to sit as a model for artists, and worse—far worse than that—to supply him with the means of living in drunken idleness, I went mad, and cared not what become of me." And mad, indeed, she was, if taking to drinking be madness. I should be sorry to be uncharitable to my own sex, Miss Alterton, but my experience tells me that an intemperate woman cannot be chaste, or, if she be, it is because she does not belong to an exposed class, or is sheltered by circumstances. The drunken husband of this woman turned her, bruised and bleeding, into the streets, and justified himself before a magistrate, by naming a neighboring beer-shop keeper as her paramour. She had a child, the sole relic of her virtuous days. She contrived to steal it from her husband, and fled. She had no means of support, no home, no character. Vice, and vice only, offered her bread. She continued in sin, and drank to drown the sense of her shame. Strange to say, her little child was the link that bound her to humanity. But for it, she would have yielded to the temptation to murder her husband, which she told me was so strong that it haunted her daily thoughts and nightly dreams. The winter proved dreadfully severe, and her child fell sick. In her bitter want, she went, with the languishing baby in her arms, to the gin palace that she had most frequented—(it was natural to go to the trader who had had the most of her money)—and asked for help. She was coarsely upbraided, and refused. She became furious, broke the windows, and was given in charge to the police. It was night, and they put her into one of the usual cells at the station, to wait the examination before the magistrate the following morning. That night in the cell, the sick child died. She had loved it, as perhaps only the solitary outcast can love. Her grief was a something so awful that the magistrate, used to scenes of woe, shrank at beholding it. He interested himself for her, and we received her here. She has once left us for a situation, but she did not give satisfaction. The sight of children threw her into such agonies that the family fancied her brain was affected, and they returned her here after a fortnight's trial. Her future is, I confess, a great perplexity to me."

"That lame girl seems quite an invalid," said Mabel.

"Ah! you mean Amy G—. She was brought up in a low public house, and initiated in vice from her childhood. Her parents both died during a cholera visitation. Their effects were insufficient to pay their debts, and this girl was only fitted by her training for the streets. In a brawl she was thrown down stairs, and the lameness you see is the result of that. When she left the hospital, I found her famishing in the streets, with no home to go to. She appeared to me the most miserable being I had ever seen. She was received here at my particular request, and here, in all probability, she will die."

"And what is the distress of that weeping child?—for she is surely under fifteen," inquired Mabel.

"Ah! that is Fanny S—. Her mother kept a cigar shop near one of the theatres—a dissolute woman, without natural affection, who treated the poor thing very badly indeed—literally sold this child to infamy. During last winter, this mother was arrested for debt, and the girl was deserted. A grocer in the neighborhood, compassionating her case, applied for her admission here. We received her; she was very docile, and happier than she had ever been in her life; but last week we received a letter from the mother, who, it seems, has passed through the insolvent court, and is now living with a publican in the borough. She demands her child from us. I have written to her, using every entreaty and argument that she would allow her to remain, but the woman scoffs at all. The publican, whom she calls her husband, has been to Mr. Burnish; there are some business transactions between them; and, as we have no power to detain the girl, this day I fear she leaves, and hence her tears. What a mother it must be that a child shrinks from, with such evident grief! True this creature makes a parade of affection to her child, but 'the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.'"

"There must be multitudes of cases that you cannot possibly receive or remedy?"

"Oh! many. Our institution (and others are like it), as far as it is successful, deals with only the very outskirts of the crime. The core of the evil is untouched. All those terrible cases like that of Jane, are in a great measure hopeless. They include a class who are unfit by early training, and subsequent ill health and dejection, for any humble industrial occupation. They are more completely lost to their friends and relations, if they have any, than the lower class; they feel their ruin more. For them death only opens a door of escape. Meanwhile, Miss Alterton, it is vain to deny that Legislation affords no adequate protection for women; that the process of convicting the harpies who traffic in innocence is difficult, tedious and expensive. The trade in strong drink, moreover, is the seducer's constant ally, the wretched outcasts complete ruin. Yes! I must say it, much as I respect the Burnish family; I grieve and blush to think how their trade is mixed up with producing all the evils their charity professes to remedy. Then the apathy of society as to the seducer's guilt—the smile for the profligate man, and the frown for his victim, all make up a list of causes that prevent any but the most limited and partial success."

"Yet, surely good is done, Mrs. Basil?" said Mabel, with a sigh.

"Yes! we must not despise the day of feeble things. It is something to snatch one from the gulf; meanwhile the rapid stream of guilt is flowing on, and bears hundreds rapidly away."

Just then a loud ring at the bell announced the carriage, and Mabel left, saddened yet instructed, by her morning's visit to these stray waifs tossed off like foam from the tide of our civilization.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Burnish's Household Spectre.

"In the very richest room in the whole castle, Hicks—such was my melancholy friend's name—stopped the cicerone in her prattle, saying, in a hollow voice, 'And now, madam, will you show us the closet where the skeleton is?'"—*Thackeray.*

Mabel, for many days after her visit to the Penitentiary, had her thoughts so occupied with what she had heard there, that Mr. Delamere Burnish found his efforts to gain her attention all useless. She paid no more morning visits to the library; she walked in the evening, at the dinner hour of the family; and, if her heart gave an unquiet throb at the remembrance of the incident recorded, she vigorously battled with it, and she thought she conquered. Meanwhile, splendid bouquets of choice flowers came by the hands of Emily and Kate to adorn the school room.

"Delamere never was so kind to us as he is now," little Kate would often say. Newspapers, magazines, and new music, flowed in with such profusion, as never would have escaped the notice of any but so languid a person as Mrs. Burnish. The truth was, that lady was rapidly settling down into the condition of invalidism, so unhappily common to women who have no wants to stimulate, and no pursuits to occupy them.

The children were growing beyond her. The boys overpowered her with their high spirits, and she oppressed the little girls with her languor. She was satisfied that the latter were making rapid progress with their new governess, and she ceased even the show of supervision which existed at the time of Mabel's arrival in the household. In point of natural capability, Mrs. Burnish was certainly inferior to the rest of the family; but she had her caprices, and could be horribly obstinate. When Mr. Theophilus Burnish, who disliked clever women, married her, he little knew—though he found out afterwards—that there is no task so difficult as that of guiding a fool. One of her foibles—a source of great annoyance to him—was a habit of making favorites in her household, in short, of putting herself under the dominion of a domestic; and one reason why Mabel was welcome to the head of the house was, that she would prove a fitter companion than those that Mrs. Burnish had hitherto sought.

Certainly, Mabel was not without a secret chagrin that she had gauged her father's business by a different standard to that which she applied to the source of the wealth she saw around her. Mrs. Basil's remarks had deepened this conviction, deal with it as she might. True, the consciousness that she did not eat the bread of idleness—that she earned fully and fairly the remuneration she received—placed her in a different position, morally, to that she could have been in, as a willing dependant on her father. Still, she was uneasy; the balance seemed, to her convictions, uneven, and when in some unwonted mood, Mr. Veering preached, on the Sunday after her Penitentiary visit, from the words, 'Straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel,' a conscious blush covered Mabel's face at the text. She needed not to fear Mr. Veering's exposition: that reverend gentleman applied the words solely to the prejudices of the Pharisees, and the scepticism of the Sadducees, eighteen hundred years ago, and preached a sermon that might have been very useful to them, if they could have heard it, but which bore no more relation to present times than David's dancing before the ark bears to modern modes of worship. Mr. Veering vindicated his claims to be considered a man of great ability, by the ingenuity with which he contrived to make all the teachings of Scripture refer to other persons, times, and modes of life than the present. The Bible, according to his mode of using it, was like a ship with stern lights; only, casting their reflection on the track she had passed. Sometimes Delamere Burnish, perhaps with the sarcasms of Shafton Keen ringing in his ears, would say to his father (who, however, kept all his household at a great distance), that he 'did not profit much by Mr. Veering's preaching,' that being the only way in which he ventured to 'hesitate dislike.' But he was silenced by the dogmatic voice of his father, saying, in reply, 'Veering is not a brilliant man, certainly. I never care for brilliant men; they are unequal, uncertain, and often dangerous—fond of novelties, and seeking applause. Veering is sound, very sound, never goes out of his depth. As to your own profiting, Delamere, whose fault is that? I doubt you have 'itching ears.' I always profit.'

"And so, I'm sure do I," he echoed his wife. "I'm sure its a great comfort to have such a preacher, and such a tutor for the boys. His opinions on all important topics are correct—they so perfectly harmonize with mine."

Nothing so annoyed Mr. Burnish as the comments of his wife on intelligent subjects; so, with a half testy assent, he took refuge in a book he was reading. From the time when Mabel gave her obnoxious opinion on temperance, she had never been honored with more than the notice that mere civility demanded from the head of the house. One evening shortly