

Kind Words.

Never hesitate a moment
If you think that you can say
But one word to help another
Through a long and lonely day.
Far more often than you think it,
Some sad, weary heart may be
Lightened by a word of kindness
Or a glance of sympathy.

Though your days are spent in toiling,
Never deem yourself too poor
To have ought to spare a brother
When one knocketh at your door.
While your heart hath love for giving,
You can cheer the darkest way:
Never hesitate a moment—
Love will teach you what to say.

Ah! more often than you think it,
In some darkened heart is stirred
Holy thoughts and softer memories,
By a gentle, joyous word.
Cast your bread upon the waters—
Love is never spent in vain—
In some joyful day hereafter,
You will find it all again.

NELLY'S DARK DAYS

By the Author of "Lost in London."

CHAPTER V.

HALF MEASURES.

As soon as Mrs. Rodney was buried, Bessie entered upon her charge of Rodney and Nelly. She was little more than a child herself in years, but her life in the streets had given her a keen, shrewd knowledge of human nature. She set about at once to make Rodney's home more attractive than it had been during his wife's illness; and every evening, as soon as her own necessary livelihood was earned, she hastened to spend all the time she could with him and Nelly. She could sing and talk well, and Rodney, whose good resolutions were never of long duration, was often induced to stay at home, or pay only a brief visit to some public-house—for the sake of society—accompanied by both Bessie and Nelly, who waited for him outside the door, now and then sending in a message; all he was assumed of keeping them longer.

There was a little change for the better. Nelly's rings were covered by a gay pink cotton frock, trimmed with a number of small flounces, which Bessie picked up cheap at a clothes shop, and which she washed until the colour was faded. Rodney often promised to buy his little daughter other clothes she so much needed; but work was slack—very slack for unsteady hands like him—and he could earn but little, more than half which still went for drink. But he had no violent outbreak; and often when he was tempted to greater excesses, there arose before his mind the memory of his dead wife, with the violets in her faded hands. This memory, with Bessie's influence and Nelly's love, had a salutary effect upon him in part, and in his heart he had determined to be altogether a changed and reformed man some day.

By degrees Rodney recovered confidence in himself and his own power of moderation. Three months had passed since his wife's death, and he had never been so drunk as to be incapable. Bessie, with the sanguine delight of a girl, believed in his reformation, and rejoiced in it openly; while Nelly praised and fondled him every day. The slavery of the habit seemed over. He was master of it; or, at least, he was no more than a hired servant, who could cast off the yoke at any moment, and be altogether free. He drank still—drank deeply; but he could come out of the gin-palace with money in his pocket—a feat impossible a few months ago. The abject drunkards, who could not tear themselves away from the neighbourhood of the spirit vaults, became objects of contempt and disgust to him.

Yet there was not, after all, much to be proud of. The poor place at home was still bare and uncomfortable, in spite of Bessie's efforts; Nelly was

pinning for better food; and he himself was shabby and out-at-elbow. No person passing him in the street would have distinguished him from the drunken objects he despised. He was feeble and tremulous still. His eyes were red and dim, and his head was hot. The only point gained was that the vice, which still had possession of him, held him with a somewhat slighter grasp.

But when the next autumn came, and heavy fogs from the river filled the town, Bessie caught cold after cold, till her spirits failed her, and she could do little more than call in at Rodney's house upon her way home to her lodgings, where she longed to lie down to rest. There was nobody to while away the listless time at home, and if he stayed longer than usual at the beer-shop or gin-palace there was no one waiting for him outside—for he took care to lock Nelly up safely before he left her. His little and little the old slavery established itself again in all its tyranny. He had built his house upon the sand, and the storm came and beat upon it, and it fell—and great was the fall thereof.

Night after night Rodney came home late, raving more furiously than ever, while Nelly crouched in the darkest corner of the little room, in an agony of terror, not daring to stir lest she should draw his attention to her. Sometimes, as she grew better, Bessie would make her way through the chilly evenings to the house, to exert her old influence, but she found that it was all gone before this new outbreak. Once he struck her brutally, and thrust her out into the rain, bidding her be gone, and come back no more; but the faithful girl would not forsake him and little Nelly. She was hoping against hope.

A SORROWFUL FACT.

It was not long before the time came when Rodney was never really sober. When he could not stagger along the narrow streets to the spirit-vaults, he sent Nelly—as scores and hundreds of little children are sent in our Christian country—and he drank himself dead drunk in the room where his wife had died. At last there was neither shame, nor sorrow, nor a consciousness of sin in his soul. Only the one absorbing, insatiable craving for drink. A seven-fold possession had taken fast hold of him, and Bessie lost all hope.

It was quite dark one evening, and Rodney was lying prostrate—unable to stir—upon the low bed, with a bottle near him which he had lately drained, but without power to fumble with his nerveless fingers for any more pence which might possibly remain in his possession. His eyes were open; and in a state of drunken lethargy he was watching Nelly going softly to and fro about the room, casting terrified glances at him from time to time. He saw her bent almost double under the weight of the old iron-kettle, which she was lifting with both her little arms on to the fire; and lying there, powerless and speechless, he saw the thin, ragged frock, with its torn and faded flounces, catch the flames between the bars, and kindle rapidly into a blazing light about her.

An extreme agony came upon him. With all the might of his will he struggled to raise himself up to save her—but he could not move. He had no more power over his own limbs than the mother's corpse would have had if it had been lying there. For a moment his little girl stretched out her arms to him, with a scream for help; and then she sprang past him to the door, and he heard the street ring and echo with her cries and the shrieks of frightened women and children. But still he could not stir. He lay there like a log, while great drops of terror and anguish gathered on his face.

How long it was he did not know—it might have been years of torment—before the door was flung open, and a woman's face looked in upon him, white and haggard with fear.

"She's burned to death!" she cried, "and you'll have to answer for it. I'm not sorry—I'm glad. She'll be better off now; and I hope they'll hang you for it! You'll have to answer for the child's death."

She drew the door to again sharply, and left him in his miserable and helpless loneliness.

Nelly was dead, then—burned to death through his sin. The intolerable agony of his spirit gave him a little strength, and he crawled upon his hands and knees to the door, and succeeded in opening it. Down in the street below the people were talking of it, the women calling to one another to tell the horrible news. He could hear many of the words they said, with his rump sometimes, and sometimes Nelly's. Dead! Was it possible that his little Nelly could be dead! Why did they not bring her home! But then a great shuddering of horror fell upon him. He could not bear to see her again. His dead child—burned to death, with him lying by, too drunk to save her!

By-and-bye his limbs gathered more power, and, with pain and toil, he raised himself to his feet. The tumult in the streets was subsiding, and the people were retiring to their houses. Some of them, who lived on the same flat, knocked at his door, with loud and angry curses, but he had locked it as soon as his fingers could turn the key, and he kept a silence like the grave.

All was quiet after a while, and the clocks of the town struck eleven. If he could only steal away now, there would be no one to stop him and ask him what he was about to do or whether he was going. The streets were almost deserted, except about the gin-palaces. He cursed them bitterly as he went by. There was now only one purpose, one idea, in his tormented brain—if his miserable feet would but carry him to the river all should soon be ended for him. Nothing in the world to come could be worse than the hell of his own sin. The only plea Bessie could urge—that he should live to make amends to Nelly—had no longer an existence.

It was slow and weary work, creeping, creeping down to the river side. He saw it long before he reached it, with the lights glimmering across it from the opposite shore. He was obliged to lean often against the walls and the lamp-posts to gain breath and power to take a few more footsteps towards his grave. He was drunk no longer. His mind was terribly clear. He knew distinctly what had happened, and what was about to happen to him if his strength would only take him down to the edge of yonder black water. His conscience raised no voice against his purpose. There was a certain feeling almost of satisfaction, that, in a little while, the tide would be carrying him out to sea.

He had almost gained a spot where a single effort would plunge him into the cooling waters. There were but few persons about, and they at some distance away far enough not to hear the splash as he fell into the basin—when his unsteady foot caught upon the curbstone, and he fell forward, dashing his head violently upon the pavement. Before many minutes had passed a police man was conveying him in a cab to the infirmary, and he was laid, unconscious and delirious, upon a bed in one of the wards there.

(To be continued.)

RALLY FOR THE SALVATION OF THE YOUNG.

ALL honour to the aged who, amidst greater sacrifices than we are called to make, laid the foundations of our institutions. High is the appreciation in which we hold the noble men and women who are now doing battle, at mature age, for the uplifting of the race.

But "the work of the aged is well nigh done." The middle-aged are rapidly passing away. The hope of the Church is in the young. They are the Church of the next century. A decade will introduce them to life's heaviest responsibilities. Among them are the ministers and other officers of the Church.

As they are in heart, in life, in zeal, in labour and success, so the Church of the next century will be. How important, then, that the quickening and uplifting grace of the Gospel should be realized in its fulness by them! The great work of the Church—the most paying work is to save the youth.