

OUR SICK CONTRIBUTOR'S FELLOW BOARDERS.

No. 9.

"THE OLD DRUNKARD."

An irreclaimable wreck of sixty-five years of age,—a man well connected, well educated, and one who must have been, at one time of his life, possessed of no ordinary ability. This, my dear Cynic, must be a melancholy paper; but my description of my fellow-boarders would be incomplete without it.

He was born in Montreal, and his relations are known and honored. He is unable to work, but has small private means of his own. He has been a widower for thirty years. It is stated that grief for the loss of his wife laid the foundation of his present habits. Our landlady has often threatened to eject him, but the boarders have always interfered in his behalf, because, strange to say, there yet clings to him something that a man can like.

I have known him for years; but, except on one solitary occasion, which I will notice presently, I never remember to have seen him perfectly sober. In fact, he has been continuously drunk for years. Drink has become a necessity of his existence. I do not think that, judged by the quantity he consumes, he can be called a *hard* drinker. His brain and nerves are now in such a condition, that a comparatively small quantity of liquor will produce the amount of intoxication which has, dreadful to say, become essential to his comfort. There is many a strong man who walks our streets with the reputation of a sober man, who drinks more than this poor imbecile. He is aware of his failing or infirmity, (call it what you will), and strives to conceal it. He sits at table, eating, as may be imagined, but little, and in a place somewhat apart, and always reserved for him at his own request. He seems quite conscious that he is not fit company for those around him,—the ladies especially. He seldom opens his mouth, lest his speech may betray him. There is something almost pathetic in this.

"What is a drunken man like?" asks Olivia, in "Twelfth Night," of her witty, sententious Fool. Mark the reply.

"Like a drowned man, a fool, and a madman! One draught above heat makes him a fool; the second mads him; and a third drowns him."

This poor creature generally contents himself with the first stage,—that of folly,—but when he arrives at the second, he becomes mad, and loses all control over himself. He does not now attempt concealment. All self-respect is gone. He becomes an insufferable nuisance,—an unmitigated bore. His tongue is loosened; he monopolises the whole conversation. He talks trash in the most voluble manner, delivers himself of stupid, childish jokes, and, sometimes,—though, I am bound to say, rarely—becomes insulting. Should any one remonstrate with him, he gets maudlin, sheds tears, and laments that the world has deserted him in his old age. He then, with difficulty and some assistance, retires to his room, and drinks himself into insensibility,—Shakspeare's last stage—that of "drowning." The next morning he refuses to believe that he made a beast of himself over-night.

It is most melancholy to see him in the street. Boys surround and jeer him; and will not go away till he has scrambled among them all the coppers, and sometimes the loose silver, he has about him. He brings liquor home by stealth in his pocket,—by bottles at a time,—which he locks up, no one knows where. Respectable grocers and tavern-keepers know him well, and refuse to serve him. He must buy his liquor at some of the lowest grogeries. On some occasions he brings home with him a set of young loafers, who sponge on him, sit in his room, play low practical jokes on the poor old man, drink his liquor, and get as drunk as himself, and infinitely more noisy. Last night

one of these eruptions occurred. The noise was disgraceful. Mrs. X. went into hysterics, and our landlady was afraid to go into the room. The "old lady," however, boldly entered, remonstrated with the delinquents and threatened the police,—and was insulted for her pains. Now, an insult to the "old lady" is, as I have said before, a thing that our house cannot and will not stand. It is an insult to the house itself. When the Captain heard of it, he quietly got up from his arm-chair, put down his pipe, and took off his coat. He then summoned to his assistance "the scientific boarder" and "the athlete." In a very short time these three ejected from the house five young blackguards, (the poet among their number), who retired yelling impotent threats of vengeance. Having put the old man to bed, peace was soon restored, and I do not think we are likely to be disturbed again in the same way.

I have said that I once saw him quite sober. It was several years ago, when we both boarded in another house. A brother of his had died, and he was going down into the country to attend the funeral. I was also going out of town that morning. We both rose early, and a separate breakfast was provided for us. The old man had promised his relations that he would not, that day, taste a drop until his brother's remains had been placed in the ground. He honestly kept his promise. The sight of him when drunk is always pitiable, but a glimpse of him sober is really terrible. There he was, with eyes glaring, limbs shaking, almost as if paralyzed, and with a painful difficulty of arranging his thoughts. His hand trembled so that he could hardly hold his breakfast cup. Out of sheer compassion I begged him to take at least a little stimulant, and offered to procure it for him. He steadily refused. I then tried to induce him to eat some solid food, but he objected. He drank two cups of strong tea, which only made him worse. I saw the poor fellow off by the train, and I hear that he rigidly kept his vow up to the time specified. Then, as may be imagined, followed a fearful reaction. He was brought home at a late hour quite insensible.

What is to be done with drunkards at this stage? The advice of friends or ministers is now too late. What was originally a moral failing—a sin if you will—has now become a deeply-seated physical disease. I do not believe in the new fashionable word "dipsomania." This is no affection of the brain, but a positive constitutional malady. A gnawing, insatiate craving for alcohol has destroyed the healthy action of the digestive organs. Can no physician prescribe for this? More than one has assured me that he can. When shall we have in Canada that much-desired institution, a Hospital for Inebriates?

PERSONAL.

MR. BARTLEY AND THE EDITOR OF THE "DAILY NEWS."—We are requested by Mr. Bartley to say that his remarks at the trial of the pumping engine the other day had no reference to the present editor of the *Daily News*. The abusive articles were written before the present Editor was connected with the paper, and he, after seeing the engine at work last winter, frankly announced its apparent success, which has since been so fully demonstrated.—*Montreal Herald, Wednesday.*

Editors, like people less renowned for veracity, should possess good memories. DIOGENES thinks a good deal of Mr. Bartley's engineering ability, but in ingenuity and poetic license his friend, the Editor, beats him hollow. The "abusive articles" of which Mr. Bartley complained appeared in the *Daily News* some months after the present Editor connected himself with that remarkable journal; and, if Morgan's "Parliamentary Companion, for 1869," (just published,) is to be believed, the Editor-in-Chief has been continuously connected with the *News* from the publication of the first number in 1867. (See page 190.) Under these circumstances the Cynic recommends Mr. Bartley to seek an apology from the present staff of the *News*. Either the Editor or the Editor-in-Chief may properly accord it.

Mr. Morgan will, doubtless, be able to inform Mr. Bartley that he derived his information from an authentic source.

* The writer does not seem to be aware of the fact that an excellent institution of this nature exists near Quebec.—ED. DIO.