

THE FAMILY DOCTOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE OVER-BURDENED HEART.

"Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."

Shakespeare.

"I want my supper," said Johnny. Mother laid aside her work, and, from the low window where she sat, looked anxiously down the street.

"Don't wait, mother; I know he isn't coming, and I am so hungry!" pleaded the child.

She rose from her seat without saying a word. It was one of her hard days, and she looked so pale and sad, as she went about getting supper, that it made my heart ache.

We had finished eating when father came in. Mother did not raise her eyes; but I was glad to see that he was sober.

"You might have waited for me," he said, as he took the cup of tea she offered. "You know I hate to eat my victuals alone."

"We wait a great many nights for you, and you don't come," said my little brother.

I thought Johnny would get a sharp answer for this; but father laughed, and said, "Well, never mind, Johnny; I am coming home to supper every night now. And, Martha, don't look so glum. I have my old place in the shop again, and I mean to keep it this time."

"Till you earn enough for another spree," said my mother without looking up.

"O mother!" I said.

"I tell you, I mean to keep it!" he repeated, without seeming to notice what she said. "I can have steady work all winter, and Lizzie shall go to school another quarter, and Johnny shall have his skates, and we'll have the old times back again. Hey, wife?"

"I don't want to hear any such promises," said my mother. "You make them one day and break them the next."

"O mother!"

"Isn't it true?" she said, sharply. "How many times has he promised never to touch liquor again, and broken his promise in a week? Lizzie, it's no use saying, 'O mother!' I am tired of keeping still. I have covered up, and smoothed over, and hid away, till my heart is ready to break; and I must talk it out, or I shall die. 'Old times back again!' I have been thinking all day, sit-

ting here in my misery and rags, with hardly food enough in the house to keep my children from starving, of the old times when I was a happy, light-hearted girl, in the little red farmhouse. You took me from that dear old home, and you squandered the money my father and mother worked so hard in their old age to lay up for their only child. You brought the curse of drunkenness under this roof before we were six months married. You went down, step by step, dragging your wife and children with you; and you talk about *old times*! What would my mother say to see me to-day? Mother! mother! I am glad you are dead." She covered her face with her apron.

"Will you hold your tongue?" said father, angrily. "How dare you talk so before the children?"

"And why not before the children?" she said with great bitterness, "Don't they know it all? What have they seen under this roof but poverty, and misery, and sin? I would rather that boy"—pointing to Johnny, who, with round eyes, looked from one to the other of his parents—"lay in his coffin to-night, than see him live to grow up to be a man, if he must be what his father is."

He snatched his hat from the table with a fierce oath, and slammed the door as he went out.

"Now, mother," said Johnny, "he's gone to 'The Corners' again, and when he comes home—"

"Hush, Johnny," I said; and, waking little Annie from her sound sleep in the cradle, I hurried the children up stairs, but all the time I was undressing and putting them to bed, and long afterwards, when the supper things were put away, and we sat down with our one candle on the little table between us, to finish the shirts that must be taken home to-morrow, I was wondering what had come over mother. For never, in all my life, had I heard her talk as she talked to father that night. In thinking it over then, I was glad to remember, and, after what followed so soon, I am glad to remember now, that I never heard her speak bitterly and reproachfully to him before. Silent and sad she was, a woman of a sorrowful spirit always, through those miserable years, but patient and forbearing, and untiring in her care for his comfort. I speak of this because, though I must tell my sad story, I wish to do my mother justice. Even at the worst, when drink made