

A MURDERER'S PLEA.



As the court was about to commit the cause to the Jury, the prisoner was asked whether he had anything further to say. Whereupon Mr. Douglass rose deliberately, and looked around on the court and spectators with great composure. His tall, manly person, brilliant eye, and eminently intellectual expression, emaciated as he was by disease, and pale with confinement, impressed every one with his personal dignity and superiority to any who were sitting in judgment upon his life.

"May it please the Court and Gentlemen of the Jury, he said, deliberately and coolly, little did I think that I should come to this. Born of parents who were able and ambitious to give their son the best education the country affords, I had advantages above most others for reaching a widely different destiny from that to which I seem to be doomed. The affluence in which I was cradled was my ruin. I was made to believe that it was manly to take a social glass. I fell in with companions, at college and elsewhere, who nourished in me this delusion. Our potations were deep, our revels boisterous. I studied law, but left my profession to look after my father's business, which was of a nature to keep the poisoned cup ever before me. I drank till I had supplied the place of a natural repugnance to strong drink with a maddened appetite which defied control with the articles within my reach.

Your Honors, and Gentlemen of the Jury, the State would hold me responsible for the consequences of drinking, on my knowledge of them beforehand. This seems specious. Yet my experience assures me that the madness does not begin with drinking, but with the causes that lead to it. It dates from personal contact with alcohol, accompanied with the consciousness of the option to drink or not drink. My wife saw the state of the case, and advised me to remove to a country where society had not yet introduced my enemy. I listened to her advice, and brought my family to this then wilderness country. For a few years we lived here in security and peace. We prospered in the world and acquired a competence. But the State then located one of its licensed groghops near my door. I guarded against the danger for months. My family stood sentinel around me," and, as he said this, his lips quivered, and the tears rolled down his manly face. "I fortified myself with resolutions and prayers, knowing that my life and that of my family were involved.

"But, your honors and Gentlemen of the Jury, my enemy subdued my strongholds, and led me captive in chains. I was surprised into the trap that the State had set for me—I say this in no spirit of recrimination—and the moment I was there all my motives of virtue perished. I was occupied with an inward feeling—call it what you please—reputation, life, were nothing to it. Had your gallows then presented itself in perspective, with myself hanging upon it as a consequence of drinking, it would not have deterred me. That was the beginning of my insanity in every case. The contact is the conquest of my enemy over me.

"In reference to the crime on