

The old woman was evidently actuated by no common feelings towards the poor family, and I felt curious to know something about her. Turning to the mother, I said, "Who is this old woman, your neighbour?—she seems to feel more than a common interest in your family." She answered, "Who she is I know not, nor will she tell me aught of her history; but to me she has proved the good Samaritan. Under a decrepit and almost unearthly form she hides the soul of an angel; and but for her, I and my children must have perished. She has tended us in sickness; she has watched over us with a mother's care; she has taken the bread from her own mouth, and the clothes from her own back, and for five long years of misery she has been our constant companion. Could any thing have cured my poor husband, surely the remonstrances of Maria Moreland would have done it."

I said to Mrs. Burton, "If I do not mistake, you must, at a former period of your life, have been in very different circumstances. Have you no friend able to assist you?" "Not one friend on earth but Maria Moreland. My father and mother died when I was yet a child, and they left me a small fortune. I was well educated. I married my poor husband, and then thought I had found a friend; but company and extravagance, and, above all, *drinking*, has reduced him to the wretched state in which you see him. But for my children, I should be glad to find an early grave."

"The grave is where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest," said Maria Moreland, as she entered the room. "Helen Burton, although in a crazy vessel on a stormy sea, must not forget the anchor of hope both sure and steadfast. Mark Burton is on the verge of eternity; but Helen his wife, who will soon be his widow, is the mother of these children, and she must wait and patiently endure, till God has placed them in other hands. Look, Sir," she said, turning to me, "there sits the man, than whom the world never saw one more promising, a victim, an early victim, to the demon of *drunkenness*!—Rouse him—draw from his own lips the history of his career, and, ere his eyes are sealed with death, if you be a Christian, tell him *what it is to die*."

I was filled with amazement at the eloquence and energy of the little old woman; and, as she was busily employed in kindling the fire and preparing the breakfast for the starving family, I seated myself on an old box, and kept musing and wondering where all this would end.

The shrill speaking voice of the old woman again broke out. "Mark Burton, are you senseless? are you dreaming? or is your mind filled with all the horrors of earth and hell? Rouse—for there is but a step between thee and the eternal world; and as sin has done her work with you, till the fuel is consumed and the fire has well nigh gone out, listen once more; I say, Mark Burton, listen once more to the voice of mercy." Mark was silent. Helen Burton directed her attention to her little ones, who had now awakened; but they could not rise, the cold was so intense; and being nearly destitute of clothing they were compelled to huddle together upon the old bed, both day and night,

to keep themselves warm. The old woman had kindled a fire very quickly, and some warm breakfast was now ready for the children, which she distributed with the greatest tenderness, at the same time pressing the poor mother to sit down by the now glowing fire, and warm herself. Helen Burton obeyed; and as she looked wistfully in the face of her besotted husband, she burst into a flood of tears.

"It is a mighty power that can change the current of woman's love," said the old woman. "Years of neglect, and sorrow, and want, crowned with sinful and debasing conduct on the part of a husband, cannot always do it, or the love of Helen Burton would have been changed to hatred cruel as the grave."

I addressed myself to the poor afflicted Helen in the mildest terms I could use; spoke to her of the loving kindness of Him whose tender compassions fail not, and, who maketh the light to shine out of darkness when it pleaseth him. She heard me in silence, her eye wandering alternately from her husband to her children, and again from her children to her husband; but I saw clearly that nature was struggling vehemently, and I could not help reflecting with pain on that wretched condition to which man reduces himself and others by the commission of iniquity. Here were before me the feeble and broken hearted mother of five children, destitute of every earthly comfort, and brought to ruin and want, apparently by the bad conduct of the only individual on earth to whom she and they had a right to look for comfort and protection. There he sat, unconscious of that ruin to which he had reduced his family, but of which he could not have been unconscious while pursuing his career of wickedness.

My reflections were broken by the voice of Maria Moreland, who again commenced her address to the drunkard. "Mark Burton, wilt thou not rouse thee? Thy wife, thy once dearly beloved Helen, seek a word from thee, ere the film of death has overcast thine eyelids.—Where are now thy plighted vows? where that kindly heart and manly form which stole the affections of Helen, pure as the dew upon the mountain top?—Mark Burton, thy children are no common beggars, but thy madness has reduced them to receive an alms from the stranger. *Thy wife and children, Mark Burton, are beggars, and they have been made so by you!*" This last sentence was expressed with great power and emphasis. Whether it was the clear, shrill intonation, which struck home upon the ear of the drunkard, or whether the sentiment expressed had touched some latent feeling not yet entirely destroyed by a long course of wickedness, I cannot tell; but Mark Burton started upon his legs, and in a tremulous but angry voice he said "Who dares to say that my wife and children are beggars?" Maria Moreland replied, "I dare tell you, Mark Burton, that the wife and children of the heir of Lindsburn are beggars, and in greater distress than the mendicant who wanders from door to door. Look around you—look at Helen your wife, hungry and half naked! Look at your children in that miserable corner—they cannot rise for want of clothing! The fire before you and the morsel of which they have just partaken, are the gifts of this messenger of mercy, and will you deny that your family are beggars?"—