

springing faster than the green ears, and the great experiment was being tried once more whether, notwithstanding Christ's solemn warning, it was not, after all, possible to 'serve God and Mammon.'

Maud had been a little disappointed that Frank had never taken the temperance pledge, not with any anxiety for his personal safety, but because, unless he did so they could not join effectually in temperance work. But Frank had either taken no notice of her plea, or else put her off with the excuse that he was so busy; he would attend to that sort of thing when his time was out.

A few more weeks sped by, and the lovers met. Frank came home in high spirits, his mother, who was growing rather feeble, overjoyed to have him with her again, and Maud beginning to feel, as they talked over their plans, that her dreams and hopes were all now very near fulfilment.

'There's no need now to wait any longer, my sweetheart,' said Frank, one evening, as, after a long talk, they were parting at Mr. Maclean's gate: 'you must get your white toggery ready as fast as you can, and we'll be married in a month, and my dear little wife shall have an easy time of it. I promise her.'

He had been telling Maud that the coveted business had been finally secured, that all the money matters were settled and they were free to start on their new life at once. Maud's heart was beating fast. She loved Frank passionately and trusted him fully, and tears of gratitude and joy filled her eyes as she thanked God for her happy lot. But even while the song of praise was yet fresh in her heart, a little vague, flickering shadow suddenly fell across the sunny prospect. They had parted at the gate, and were just taking a lingering farewell as they strolled along on either side of the fence, Maud following the garden path, and Frank doing a little trespassing in the flowery meadow.

'And there's another fine thing about that business,' said Frank. 'It has a licence for wines and spirits, though old Fotheringham never pushed it much; there's a lot of money in it, and I shall get an "off" at the next Brewster Sessions and do a lot of beer trade.'

Maud was silent. A little miserable chill crept to her heart, for she did not at all relish the announcement, and yet could not bear to vex Frank in the very least.

'Of course, I shall conduct the business properly,' he went on; 'it will be much better in our hands than in a publican's.'

But the explanation did not mend matters at all. It only impressed the fact more vividly on Maud's mind that there would exist some strong resemblance between her husband's business and that bane of the village, the public-house.

'But, Frank,' she faltered, 'you know I am a pledged abstainer—you almost promised me you would sign too. Could you not be content with the groceries? There is danger, surely, to others, if not to us, in the drink.'

'Content! How ridiculous you women are!' retorted Frank, with quite unnecessary and unexpected warmth. 'That's how you hamper a fellow who has the least spark of enterprise. I call it abominable selfishness! Here am I offering you a good time of it, and a nice home, and you seem to forget there is anyone else to think of but yourself. There's mother to care for, and I'm bound to make the best thing of the business for her sake!'

'Oh, Frank dear, forgive me!' said Maud, quite frightened at this sudden outburst of anger—'forgive me; I was not forgetting

dear mother, but—I don't quite like the business—I don't feel sure it's right—and we do not take the drink ourselves, you see.'

'Not like it! Well, I suppose we don't sell butter and tea because it is so particularly charming an occupation,' replied Frank, with a touch of contempt in his tone; 'and what do women understand about business, I'd like to know? You mind your affairs and I'll mind mine, and we'll get on well enough; and as for your pledge, I'm not asking you to break it, any more than I want you to eat all the pickles my customers may happen to fancy. And as for the beer,' he went on, 'if I can sell one bottle at a time it will save the women and children from going up to that horrid Roebuck public-house. Why, my dear, we shall be promoting temperance after all, and filling our pockets at the same time.'

'Promoting temperance by selling beer—that seems a little strange,' said Maud, doubtfully, very much distressed and puzzled by Frank's explanation. She did not know



anything about the conditions of licences, or about the argument that selling intoxicating drinks at a grocer's conduces, in some mysterious way, to sobriety; but she could not get rid of the painful and most unwelcome conviction that now, for the first time, her notions of right and wrong, dim though they were, conflicted with Frank's.

Further assurances of the perfect innocence of the business—in which her lover was so anxious to engage did not improve matters, and finally the young man departed in a huff, declaring 'there was no accounting for women's tantrums,' and Maud went indoors as intensely miserable as she had been blissfully content but an hour before.

But the next morning a happy thought occurred to her. Mrs. Evans would no doubt disapprove of the plan, and meanwhile she would consult her former Sunday-school teacher, and see what advice she would give on the matter. The chat with Miss Robins, however, rather tended to complicate matters. That lady believed, she said, 'in true temperance'—that is, in 'moderation in all things, and the right and

thankful use of the good creature of God'—quite ignoring the fact that nobody thinks of swallowing dangerous poisons (even if less perilous than alcohol) in moderation; and also taking for granted that an agent which manifests the works of the devil, and hinders the kingdom of God as nothing else has ever done, is actually a 'good creature of God.' She assured Maud how easily she would exercise a wise judgment in selling these drinks to 'those who knew how to use them and might really need them as medicines.'

Miss Robins wound up her very confusing remarks on a subject of which she knew nothing—never having given it any really thoughtful attention—by dwelling impressively on the affection of the young couple. 'You have loved each other long and truly,' she said. 'You both desire to serve God—that is a most blessed foundation for wedded happiness. Let nothing, therefore, come between you to cause contention or the least shade of bitterness. Each must bear and forbear, and neither can always have their own way, and certainly, in business matters, it is the wife's duty to yield a mere little prejudice of her own to her husband's judgment.'

All this sounded very excellent and pious, and Maud was strongly influenced by it. Her misgiving began to subside, and she felt quite virtuous at the thought of giving up her own wishes in the matter. Of course, it would be very delightful to grow rich, like that excellent man, the wine and spirit merchant, who had given so 'geily' to the new organ, and took the chair in so able a manner at the missionary meetings. The empty argument to which she had listened was in danger of stifling the clear, faithful voice of conscience, which, tender and true, had sounded out its timely alarm, and Maud was tempted to act still more foolishly than the rich young man of past days, who made no attempt to reconcile disobedience to Christ's commands with an outward following of Him, and who chose Mammon, and Mammon alone, sorrowful as he was in making the choice.

And when the puzzled girl told Mrs. Evans of her scruples the good old lady only smiled blandly and seemed surprised. 'You quite vexed my boy the other night,' she said. 'Frank is a bit hasty, and he'd set his heart on doing his best for you and me, dearie, and you see men understand these business affairs as we don't. The best grocers have wine licences, of course; it's convenient to their customers and prevents so many public-houses. If you think my Frank's going to be a drunkard—well, you'd better not have him at all, and say so straight.'

The last words were only a little banter, but they hurt Maud, and she protested her perfect confidence in her lover with a little outburst of tears.

'That's all right, my dear,' said the old lady soothingly. 'You are a dear, good girl, and you'll be the making of my boy, if indeed he could be any better than he is. Keep your pledge, dear, if you like, only we mustn't lay down laws for other people.'

But while Maud's scruples were being thus dispelled, Frank, while away from home for a few days, was secretly uneasy, though he did not choose to own it. He had seen the fearful influence of the drink-trade in his master's business, and been horrified at the suicide of one of his companions, brought about by gambling and drink. A sermon, too, which he heard just then on the words, 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,' struck home, and rankled unpleasantly. Had