

bad husband and father. The family at the Manor had gone to spend some years on the Continent, and the agent who managed the estate was lukewarm and indifferent about the habits of the tenants, provided they paid their rents. It was not long before Edward was in arrears; his character had changed, he had become harsh and exacting towards his customers—no more credit, no more civility, no more good faith, and no more probity. The money he received was no longer expended on household wants, or laid by for term-day; it was all spent in drinking, or futile attempts to redeem his losses at play. For a long while Agnes hoped all from the natural goodness of her husband's heart, but that heart became hardened by sin; and if he could not look with indifference on the misery he occasioned to his wife and children, he only ran the oftener to the ale-house to deaden his susceptibilities with drink. The good priest strove in vain to reclaim him; at first he seemed truly penitent, and promised amendment, but falling again, false shame estranged him more and more from his spiritual father, until his habits had become inveterate.

The market-day arrived, and Edward had a calf to sell. Under pretence of avoiding the bellowing of the poor little animal when led away from its mother, he insisted on leading the cow along with it to the fair. Agnes had a sorrowful presentiment, and resisted the proposal as long as she could without giving offence, or infringing on that duty of obedience which she owed to her husband, and from which she had never swerved, notwithstanding his unworthiness; but at length compelled to yield, she milked her favourite Brunie, now her only cow, and the tears ran down her cheeks as she thought her little ones would no longer have the only nourishing food she had been able to give them for many a day. It was the month of July, and Agnes had been busy all day in mending the almost worn-out garments of her little ones; it was evening, and she sat at the cottage door while the children gambolled around.—“O Mamma,” said a little fellow, “only look what a big drove of cattle are coming along the high-road!” Hardly had he spoken, when a cow, escaping from the herd, ran rapidly towards the mill; then all the children clapped their hands with joy, for they recognised their favourite, for whose absence they had been mourning all day. But their joy was soon changed into bitter tears: two men followed the animal, carrying large sticks, with which they began to beat her.—“O do not hurt poor Brunie,” cried Agnes, her voice almost drowned in roars of indignation and anger from the children. “Do not hurt her, this was her home; only let me give her a mouthful of corn, and then take her gently away, for I see you

have bought her.” The men soon saw how matters stood; they were very civil, and tried to console the children, offering them some gingerbread, but the poor things would not be comforted, and wept for their favourite cow. “I’ll tell you what,” said one of the men, “I have a farm only twenty miles off, and if you can re-purchase the beast within the year, you shall have her for the same money I gave for her; so live on hope, it’s a long lane has no turning; and I promise you she shall be kindly treated for your sakes;” and bidding them good evening, he went away. The night passed, and Edward did not return. Towards noon of the following day he made his appearance; for the first time he beat his wife, and repulsed his children when they approached him: the justice of God overtook him, and he was found dead in a ditch into which he had fallen when returning home in a state of brutal intoxication. Poor Agnes, her cup of misery was full. During the two miserable years of her husband’s misconduct, although almost heart-broken, she had bowed with humble submission to the will of God; she knew that it is through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of Heaven; and though her cross was a heavy one, she took it up and bore it after her Lord. Towards her husband she had always conducted herself with the most unwearyed gentleness and patience; but unfortunately, instead of reclaiming him, her admirable conduct added stings to his conscience, and helped to drive him oftener to the bottle to drown his senses in strong drink.

The funeral of the unhappy man was over. Agnes sat in her cottage ruminating on the future, the past she hardly dared to think of; her children lay sleeping in their beds, the tears still wet on their pale cheeks. ‘To-morrow,’ said she to herself, ‘I will give up all to the creditors; I fear it will be long before I am able to pay my husband’s debts, but they are kind and they will wait.’ Then falling on her knees before a crucifix which hung on the wall, ‘Saviour,’ she cried, ‘Thou seest me, Thou hearest me, and Thou wilt help me to suffer, not with patience only, but with joy; for every tear I shed will be a pearl in the crown of glory which Thou wilt bestow upon me if I persevere to the end.’ Then looking towards a picture of the Virgin which hung near, she said in the words of St. Bernard, ‘Remember, O Most Holy Mother, that no one ever implored thy protection and assistance without obtaining relief. Be a Mother to me and to my children. Mother Mary, I trust in thee.’ She arose with a weight of sorrow removed from her heart; her guardian angel seemed whispering words of comfort, and she sunk to rest experiencing that peace which the world can neither give nor take away. Next day she went to