

rarely uttered without a blessing. It was considered a public calamity in the town of Mill-Regis when Mrs. Morrell met with an accident that injured the knee-joint, and threatened serious consequences. You know the fame of C—, the celebrated surgeon; he was my coadjutor in the treatment of the case. Though he was consulted at a very early stage, his skill was baffled, and there was no hope of saving the limb. When amputation was resolved on I trembled for the result, for Mrs. Morrell's constitution had been weakened by the many demands her numerous family had made on it. Though but a young woman, she had not the elasticity of youth, and we resorted, both before and after the operation to stimulants; for the purpose of sustaining nature, as we said. She bore the amputation with the fortitude women pre-eminently show in operations, but I confess I had my doubts about the regime prescribed for my patient. I had misgivings that the nature of these stimulants, so freely ordered by the faculty, had never been sufficiently studied. They are a convenient and popular prescription, but I was conscious that a fit of illness, or a prolonged attendance on the sick, often brought on the worst of maladies—intemperance. I knew that women were often the victims of medical advice, but, coward that I was, I yielded my judgment, stifled my convictions. The luxurious, delicious, deceptive potion was taken daily in all innocence by Mrs. Morrell, and soon looked for with eagerness; relished, relied on, found indispensable. For two months she lay in imminent peril; then, in a fitful way, she began to mend. She was fearfully harassed with neuralgic pains. Narcotics, as well as stimulants were freely administered. She bore her sufferings with patient sweetness, and her fine mind long surmounted the horrors both of her malady and her medicines. Oh! to think of her clinging to life for her children's sake—willing to suffer and to try all things if she might be restored, mutilated cripple as she was, to train the little group, whose pictures hung round her room to feast her eyes when she was for weeks too weak to have them brought to her. And yet, though the mother's heart-strings were pulled earthwards by little hands, there were times when the soul soared heavenward, and with an unfaltering tongue she could say, 'Not my will, but Thine, be done.'

Her sister's love and care were so constant that her health began to suffer. I had placed an experienced nurse with Mrs. Morrell from the commencement of her illness; and as the more urgent symptoms abated, Miss Digby gave her attention more fully to the three children who were at home—the four eldest had been placed at school. Things were in this state, when calling, as was my custom the last thing at night, I was startled by a strange incoherence in Mrs. Morrell's manner. She had been weeping bitterly, and appeared all at once to realize how helpless she had become, and must ever remain. No person in health can, perhaps, estimate the anguish with which a young and beautiful woman, beloved and admired, finds herself suddenly an object of pity, maimed, and dependent for life. I tried to comfort her, but she resented my condolence; and I left her with the thought that her fine temper and spirit were both worn with her trials, and that it would be advisable to remove her as soon as possible to a cottage Mr. Morrell had taken on the banks of the Mill-Regis river, three miles south of the town. In about three weeks from the evening in question, on a splendid July day, the invalid was removed to her pleasant retreat, where the river flowed peacefully before the cottage, and deep

woods in the rear extended for miles. I was satisfied with the immediate effects of this change, though I never saw again the look of resignation that had been so affecting in the early stages of her illness. She became abstracted, melancholy, querulous; and I was startled by Maria asking me one day whether such continued potions of strong drink, as the nurse administered, could be either necessary or safe? I found, on inquiry, that my original prescription had been doubled in quantity. In vain I tried to reduce the dose. Sleeplessness and terrible neuralgia wore the sufferer, or deep despondency threatened to settle down upon her. I would have given my right arm to have undone the injury that stimulants, scientifically prescribed, were doing to both mind and body. I called in a medical friend, experienced in disease of the brain, and he treated my fears lightly, and, above all things, protested against any reduction of either sedatives or stimulants. Uneasy, and apprehending I know not what, I redoubled my attention, and as summer waned into autumn, I became convinced that the nurse was not a safe person to administer stimulants, either as medicine or beverage. We talk with horror of poisonings—these professional nurses have one poison ever at hand that kills more than all the rest put together.

I communicated my dissatisfaction to Mr. Morrell, who was at that time at his counting-house at Mill-Regis. He went immediately to the cottage deliberating how to effect the removal of the nurse without agitating his wife. To his great relief Mrs. Morrell made a complaint that the nurse talked to her in the night, and prevented her sleeping, and proposed that the woman's bed should be removed to the adjoining room. As this seemed to meet the difficulty halfway, and to be a preliminary that would lead soon to the dismissal of the nurse, my friend assented to the plan, and left his wife's sofa considerably relieved. He then looked in upon Miss Digby who was with the children in the nursery. Pressing business compelled him to return and pass the night at Mill-Regis, and when he parted from his wife he remembered afterwards that she called him back and said—"Edward, dear, forgive me all the trouble I have caused you."

"Forgive," that's a wrong word," he answered, "and so is 'trouble.'"

"Never mind, Edward!" she insisted, "let me say the words once more, 'Forgive me, dear!'"

He humored her request, for the tears were brimming her eyes,—and they parted. Ah! never to meet again!

Mrs. Morrell's apartments were two parlors on the left-hand side of the little entrance hall. They were convenient, as she could be carried from her bed to the sofa in the sitting-room more easily than up and down a stair-case; and it was settled the nurse that night should remove her chair-bed into the front parlor, and Mrs. Morrell, alluding to herself, expressed a hope that "she should have rest and quiet that night." She insisted on the folding doors between the rooms being closed and a table put against them, and when the nurse urged that she must come to give the patient medicine in the night, Mrs. Morrell said—"Come at five o'clock, I will not take it earlier."

Maria, as was her wont, read and prayed at her sister's bedside; thought her unusually composed, and without any misgiving, left her for the night, merely telling the nurse, aside, to go into her room about one o'clock, but not to speak to the invalid unless the latter spoke.

It was a rainy night, and the back windows were beaten by heavy showers. Once

Maria awoke, and thought she heard a crackling sound. She slipped out on the landing, looked over the stairs, and saw the nurse returning from the bedroom along the passage, to the front parlor. Miss Digby did not speak, but looking at her watch by the twilight, she saw it was one o'clock. Pleased with this proof of the nurse's vigilance, she retired to rest, and slept soundly for three hours, when she was awakened by a loud shriek. She sat up—the cry was repeated; her name was called frantically by the nurse. To leap out of bed, throw a dressing-gown round her, and rush down-stairs, was the work of a moment. All was darkness. The nurse had risen to visit her patient, and on entering the room was startled to find her night-light extinguished. Returning to fetch her own candle, as tremblingly she re-entered the chamber, a strong gust of wind blew it out. She called to her mistress, and rushing forward past the foot of the bed, the drifting rain dashed upon her face from the open window. Her screams of horror, and wild call had brought Maria to the room, who instantly laid her hands on the bed,—it was empty!

"What have you done with my sister?" was the momentary cry; for, she afterwards explained, the helplessness of the invalid was so complete—she had never yet been able to use a crutch, and was lifted about like an infant—that the idea of her moving by herself never once entered her mind. Fearing she knew not what, Maria went back to her room, procured a light, and returned to the bewildered nurse, still demanding, "Where is my sister—what have you done with her?"

She was not in the room; and, looking from the window, the fitful moonlight struggling through a wild wrack of clouds, showed them nothing but the wet garden path, and the dripping boughs of trees swept by the early autumn gale. To leap down from the window and run along the path, followed by the shrieking nurse, was Maria's first impulse. No voice replied to their calls, and a terrible instinct led her to a well at the very bottom of the long garden. Even in the darkness of the night she found that the cover of the well, placed there as a precaution against accident to the children, had been removed, and by the brink Maria's feet were entangled in some obstacle. She lifted it in her hands and, by the feel, she knew it was Mrs. Morrell's Angola shawl! The maidservants, aroused by the cries, after what seemed to the distracted sister a dreadful delay, brought lanterns to the well, and there, in its depths, to their amazement as well as horror, lay, in the stillness of death, the well-known form. It was a shock that might well madden the brain of the beholder; and a panic seized Maria, so that, involuntarily wrapping the wet shawl she had found over her dressing-gown, she fled, with bare feet and head, through the woods that intervened between the cottage and Mill-Regis, and never stopped till she fell senseless at her brother's door. A policeman, who saw her fall, and recognized her, roused the household. In a few minutes the tidings of some terrible catastrophe spread. Mr. Morrell, followed by many friends, I among the number, hastened to the cottage. Meanwhile help had been procured, and two laboring men had succeeded in bringing up the corpse. When I entered the house, and passed through to the garden, not knowing what to expect, the cold glimmer of early dawn showed me a ghastly sight—Mrs. Morrell, her drenched clothes so tightly fastened and bound round her, that all doubts as to her dying by her own hands was removed, lay on the little lawn—her children's play-place! The husband, pale as a spectre, was kneeling on the wet grass, embracing the