

CHOICE LITERATURE.

"ACCIDENT OR MURDER?"

"BARN-LEY.—This afternoon an inquest was held here touching the death of John Ives, forty-seven, a shoemaker, who fell into a water-wheel at Barough Corn-mill on Monday while intoxicated, and was literally dragged to pieces. A verdict of accidental death was returned."—"The Daily Telegraph," Oct. 17, 1878.

The perusal of the above paragraph carried my mind back to an event which happened five years ago. It made a deep impression upon me, and helped materially to form the convictions I now hold upon the temperance question.

I was staying in a village on the south coast of England, with the twofold object of enjoying the society of some friends and recruiting my health, which was very much impaired by labour and anxiety, arising from family trouble. The inhabitants of the place, I was informed, numbered upwards of five hundred, but the cottages were so scattered, that I did not at first give it credit for possessing half that number. In consideration of the surviving relatives of the persons who will appear in this short sketch, I give the village a fictitious name; feeling assured that any investigation into the truth of the narrative would, while affirming all I state, only tend to reopen old wounds, and awaken a sorrow which I trust is slumbering in the breasts of some good, honest, simple people. For the same reasons the names of the people are given by myself as substitutes for the real ones.

Among the labouring people none were more respected than Stephen Daker and his wife. Stephen was a man with a mind more active than one usually finds among his class, and in his young days had been rather wild and restless in spirit—not dissipated, but unsettled and dissatisfied with things around him—and in common with many like him entertained wild views of equality, and wealth and prosperity for all, hoping, as others did, to obtain all these by a political movement which was to uproot the whole constitution of England and its society, and put the untried and ridiculous idea of equality to work in its place. He joined the Chartists, and would have figured prominently in the miserable disturbances of 1848, if he had not fallen in love with a good sensible girl, who afterwards became his wife. It was her sound sense that checked him in his foolish career, and sent him back to his work to prepare a home for her, instead of poverty, and perhaps a prison, for himself.

He was ever after thankful that he had been guided to take the advice of his wife, and, unlike many men, was never ashamed to own the fact.

At the end of the first year of his married life his wife gave birth to twins, both boys. They were named Mark and Luke respectively, and both were healthy, and stronger than the general run of infants. It needed no mother's eye to see how really fair and sturdy they were, and it is of these twigs I am about to write.

They grew up in form and feature so exactly alike that nobody but their parents could tell them apart, but in disposition there was a wide difference. Mark had the wild, turbulent nature which marred his father's youth; and Luke the mild forbearance and the sober good sense of his mother. Their affection for each other, as is generally the case with twins, was stronger than that of ordinary brotherhood.

But deeply as Luke undoubtedly loved his brother, he had within him a wilful disposition, a perversity which that brother could not often guide or govern, and what Luke failed to do the parents found out of their power to accomplish.

In boyhood Mark gave a great deal of trouble, was a bad attendant at school, playing the truant, and now and then inducing the quiet Luke to follow him in his wicked ways. When punished for their misdeeds Luke bore it quietly, but Mark was often rebellious, which brought upon him further chastigation.

As in boyhood so in youth. Mark and Luke worked on the same farm, and mixing with men, began, as youths are fond of doing, to ape men's ways. Mark set the example in smoking and drinking, and in time Luke, notwithstanding the promptings of his conscience, followed him. This falling off was marked with pain by their parents, who admonished and besought in vain. Mark was immovable, and Luke, linked to him by the twin tie of birth, continued to follow the teachings of his brother. Even to leaving the parental roof.

"We are earning good wages," said Mark, "and we can lodge out, like men."

They were about nineteen then, and were two of the finest young fellows in those parts. Mark was the favourite, for he was the gayest; but Luke—quiet, gentle Luke—had plenty of sober people who were his friends. After leaving their home they only saw their father once a week or so, as he worked on the other side of the village, but the mother who yearned over them came nearly every night. Sometimes she found them at home, but that was at the end of the week. Up to Wednesday they were generally at the inn, where Mark drank with the best or worst of them, and Luke hesitatingly followed in the same track.

Luke, I was told, was always urging his brother to give up his wild companions, but Mark either did not heed him when he spoke, or with a few kind words and a smile which Luke could not resist, asked him, "Not to preach," but "be a man, as he was."

"A little drink cheers us," Mark would say, "so have your mug filled again, Luke, and be merry with the rest of us."

At last the time came when Luke would drink no more, and his reformation came about in this way. Stephen Daker, a total abstainer since his marriage, came down one night to the public-house to see if he could not help his unhappy children. It was not the first attempt by many he had made, but hitherto Mark had put him away with kind words and promises, none of which he kept.

On this night Mark was very much the worse for drink, and Stephen, who entered the tap-room boldly to rescue his children, said a few hard but justifiable things to the elder

members of the assembled company. Some of them resented it, the landlord came in and gave his opinion, and finally Mark with only a few preliminary words got up and struck his father. Luke, who was sitting in a corner, was between them in a moment. Mark, grumbling and cursing under his breath, resumed his seat, and Stephen Daker went sorrowfully home.

From this hour a great change came over Luke. Horrified by the unnatural scene he had witnessed, which he rightfully charged to the influence of drink, he gave up the public-house, abandoned all intoxicating liquors, and exerted himself to the utmost to induce his brother to do the same.

But Mark would not listen. Perversely he kept up his old courses, and would have lost his work again and again if it had not been for Luke, whose good character helped them both. Their employer feared if he sent one away he would lose the other, and Luke was too good a servant to be parted with.

At home there was much sorrow. Stephen Daker and his wife mourned over their wild son more than they would if he had been dead, and Luke came to see them and join in their grief. After that night when he struck his father, Mark never came near his parents, or even asked after them.

From bad to worse the doomed youth went. Lower and lower down the scale—less at his work and more at the public-house as the weeks sped by. Through all Luke never deserted him, or ceased to persuade him to turn his back upon what was causing his ruin. Luke would not enter the public-house except to urge his brother to leave, and the ribald jests of the taproom and the angry reproach of his brother did no more than send him outside, where he waited in all weathers to take home the fallen Mark.

But was Mark indifferent to this affection? Was all that was good and noble dead within him? No; for when sober he would talk to his brother as he did of old—call him "Dear Luke," and listen with attention to his exhortations; but anon, some drinking companion would come that way and hold out the old temptation, and Mark would fall again. Through all and in all Luke never deserted him until one winter's eve.

They were homeward-bound from their work, and Luke had hopes of getting his brother past the public-house, for he had no money left, and his credit was as good as stopped. Mark had been drinking during the day, and was, as drunkards say, "a little gone;" not intoxicated, but on that dangerous middle-ground where a man has his ears open to the voice of the tempter, and sees naught but the gloss he puts over the advancing ruin. "We will go home to-night," Luke kept saying. "Ay, ay," replied Mark, "we will go home," but the tone was that of indifference.

The shortest way home was unfortunately past the inn, and owing to the great rains, the path across the fields was very heavy travelling; but Luke would even then have gone the latter way if he could have induced Mark to do so. Mark, however, was firm.

"I'll not go in," he said; "there'll be nobody there to-night."

Opposite the public-house they met one of his old companions, an idle, dissolute fellow, some twelve years the senior of the two brothers, ruined in mind, body, and character, and fallen to the terribly low level of one who took delight in compassing the ruin of others, especially the young.

"Ha! Mark," he said, "I am glad to see you; come in and have a glass."

"I have no money," said Mark.

"Nay, lad, don't let that hinder you," said the other. "I have a shilling—it's enough for two. The room is empty to-night, and I am lonely there?"

"Why not go home?" asked Luke; "you will not find it lonely with your wife and children."

"I want the company of men," was the answer; "not drivelling women and crying children. Come, Mark, one glass, and you shall go home in half an hour."

"Don't go," pleaded Luke, clutching his brother by the arm; "it's no good to you, and the money that man is going to spend is wanted at home."

"Nay, he'll spend it all on himself if he give none to me," replied Mark, shaking off his brother. "I've stood to him many a time, and it's now his turn to stand to me. You go home, and I'll follow."

More urgent pleadings had no effect. Mark went inside with his sallow companion, and Luke was left outside. It was a bitter night, early in winter, with a wind unusually cold—heavy dull clouds in the sky, and a few flakes of snow falling. For a moment the glowing fire of the taproom had its allurements for Luke, but he shook them off, and walked quietly up and down waiting for his brother. His heart was heavier than usual; there was the dim shadow of coming evil which we call presentiment upon him, and he could not put it away.

"I'll wait for him if he is there till midnight," he said.

But he had to leave, for presently one of the villagers came by, and asked him if he had heard the news at home.

"What news?" asked Luke.

"Your mother is very ill," was the reply; taken this morning and has been bad all day. The doctor is with her now."

Luke thanked the bearer of this sad news, and hurried into the taproom where Mark and his friend were drinking. Mark was now on the high road to intoxication. He heard the tidings of his mother's illness with drunken indifference, and supposed it was a "little attack of something."

"But you go on, Luke," he said, "and I'll come directly."

"No, now—this moment," replied his brother. "I have a feeling in me that this is no common illness."

But Mark would not come, and Luke went alone. At home he found his sad presentiment more than fulfilled. His mother was at death's door, and in half an hour she was gone. She died with one hand in Luke's, and the other held by her husband, blessing them both. Of the deep sorrow which Mark's absence must have caused her she made no mention. She asked a dozen times simply if he had come; and her at-

tention was often directed to the sound of footsteps outside, hoping they might be his; but that was all.

Luke's grief, born of a double sorrow, was intense. That his mother should die so suddenly, and his brother be so indifferent, bowed him down, and brought such tears from his heart as strong men shed in their agony.

Two hours elapsed, and Mark not coming, Luke set out again in quest of him. Outside the night had grown very dark and cold, and the air was full of sleet and snow. Luke with his head bent down to meet the wind, plodded back to the inn. The taproom was empty, and the landlord in the bar, smoking, without a customer to converse with.

"Where is Mark?" asked Luke.

"Left an hour ago," replied the landlord, slowly. "He said something about going home to see his mother, but I fancy he was a little too far gone for that."

Luke could have said something not very pleasant for that landlord to hear, but he refrained, and hurried off to the house where he and Mark lodged. There he learned that his brother had not been near. From there he hastened home, but gained no news of Mark.

He spent all that night in going to and fro in search of his brother; he also went over to the house of the man he had left him with. There all was dark, but he heard sounds of quarrelling, and the voice of the dissolute drunkard high above all, cursing—oh, so fearfully!

"Mark is not there," he said, and went home again sorrowfully, to console his afflicted father, as best he could.

A sad night—a long, weary night, and then the cold dawn. Father and son sat by the fire hand-in-hand.

"Mark has not come home," said the father.

"I will go and seek him again," said Luke.

He went back to their lodging-place, to and fro, to this place and that, where Mark was likely to be found, but there were no signs of him. The morning passed, and afternoon came, and he was still away.

But why dwell upon that dreadful time? Mark was missing for two whole days, and then was found dead in the river that ran through the village. His body was discovered near the mill, but it was conjectured that he had mistaken his path in the darkness, and walked into the water much higher up. But, however it came about, he was dead, and all the world could not bring him to life again.

An inquest was held, and I with many others attended it. I call to mind now that scene. The inquest, mark you, was held in the very room where Mark had taken the poison that lured him to death. The coroner, a kindly gentleman at home I have no doubt, but used to such scenes, and anxious to get away to escape a cold drive through the country in the dark, a dozen labourers summoned to act as jurymen, myself and half a dozen lawyers, and the few witnesses who had anything to say about the case were present; Luke in a corner of the room weeping bitterly.

Mark's loving friend was there, the worse for drink of course, and from his stammering utterances it was gathered that he and Mark left the house together, but parted outside, as their ways were in different directions.

"Was he sober?" asked the coroner.

"I dunnow," replied the sot; "I was drunk, and maybe he was about the same."

"Ah! a clear case," said the coroner. "What say you gentlemen of the jury? These lamentable accidents are of frequent occurrence."

The jury took the hint from the coroner, and returned a verdict of "Accidental Death." But the moment it passed their lips, Luke stepped forward to protest against it.

"Call that an accidental death!" he said, with a face burning with indignation, and speaking with forcible rugged pathos; "accidental death! why I tell you he was murdered!"

"Murdered!" exclaimed the coroner.

"Yes," continued Luke, "by the poison he drank here. He was as good as a dead man before he left here, as he had not so much reason and sense left as ought to be in a brute beast."

"Well, that's a social question I have nothing to do with," said the coroner, calmly putting on his gloves. "The death in the eye of the law is accidental. Twelve intelligent men have returned a verdict to that effect, and I have nothing to do with your private opinions upon the question of drink."

Then he buttoned his gloves and went his way; and the jury, half inclined to smile at the words spoken by Luke in his agony, went into the bar to spend the money allowed them by law for their attendance.

And Luke, what of him? He went home and wailed all night over the dead body of his brother. The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death," but Luke said it was "Murder." Was he right or was he wrong? I personally have examined the scene of this untoward disaster, and cannot conceive how a sober man could have mistaken his way. His road to his house was to the right, that to the stream to the left; one way uphill the other downhill. It was suggested that he committed suicide; but does that make matters any better? Would he, a sober man, have gone that dark night deliberately down to the stream and destroyed the life God had given him? Certainly not.

It was a pitiful story from beginning to end. The great tie between the brothers as twins made the sorrow of Luke all the greater, in any case it would have been bad enough, but in this it seemed as if his heart had really broken.

Mother and son were buried together, and Luke and his father were not the only mourners. Many friends came to pay a last tribute of respect to the really noble woman who had saved Stephen Daker from ruin. He had said so fifty times in her hearing, and it is his belief that she would eventually have drawn her son out of the pit if they had lived.

In the telling of this story I have not dwelt much upon her efforts, as it was my purpose to depict the relative positions of the two brothers; but all that a tender-hearted mother and a Christian woman could do was done in vain, we know, but that does not in any detract from her love and goodness.

After the funeral, Luke Daker could not rest in the place, and went over the sea to America. The last I heard of him was in the columns of a New York paper, wherein I learned