

Tales and Sketches.

THE BURNISH FAMILY.

A PRIZE STORY PUBLISHED BY THE SCOTTISH TEMPERANCE LEAGUE.

CHAPTER IV.

Theophilus Burnish, M.P., his Family and his Conscience.

"Our first great mover, and our last great end
Is one: and by whatever name we call
The ruling tyrant—self is all in all."

Churchill.

Mr. Theophilus Burnish, without being a man of genius, or even talent, was generally described as "A man of the time,"—"Up to the mark," "Safe in his principles," "Sound in his opinions," "A friend of the people," "A true philanthropist." He had inherited from his parents not only a good fortune but a prosperous business, which returned its annual thousands with as much regularity as the earth yields her increase. He had always managed his business matters by proxy—examined his balance sheet—and left details to his son and well-trained subordinates. Not so his father. He had entered a brewery-firm, then a small affair, first as clerk; risen to be manager, married the only daughter of the leading partner—the present Lady Burnish—became himself the architect of one of the largest brewery concerns in our beer-drinking country, was knighted, and died Sir Hopwood Burnish, leaving a name fragrant, as Mr. Veering said, for piety, and all his sons rich and prosperous gentlemen. Great on 'Change at Lloyd's, and the Docks, was the name of Burnish, but greater still that of the two eldest sons, for they kept on the two great trades their father had established. Theophilus was a brewer, Felix a distiller.

Besides (or in consequence of?) their reputation as capitalists, the Burnish name ranked high in the religious world. None were more eligible as chairmen of Bible societies, or anti-slavery meetings, than the brothers. None were more indefatigable in the country as magistrates, or in town as members of parliament. And as for plans for bettering the condition of the poor, improving prisons and workhouses, sending the Gospel to the heathen abroad, aiding associations for the suppression of vice and mendicancy, and every other kind of pruning of the great Upas tree of vice and misery; no one could exceed them in zeal and liberality. Capital plans all, only soiled and smudged by the smoke of the brewery and distillery.

When Mabel entered Mr. Burnish's elegant mansion in Portland Place, she congratulated herself on the pleasant apartment appropriated as school and sitting-room for the little girls and herself. Everything that wealth could do to promote comfort was done in that house. The near proximity to the Regent's Park promised pleasant walks with her young charge. "And I shall be living usefully—maintaining myself," said Mabel, with a glow of pleasure mantling on her cheek. At this instant Mrs. Burnish, accompanied by two sweet little girls came to welcome her, and immediately a recognition took place. The lady said, "I have seen you before, I forget where."

Mabel assisted her memory, "Oh, was it indeed! in the railway carriage a month back, when we came to town?" Then followed introductions of the children, Emily and Kate, aged nine and seven, and all the preliminaries of future plans. Mabel found she was to breakfast with the family, the rest of her meals were to be taken with her pupils. This arrangement was all that could be desired; and when Mrs. Burnish left to dress for dinner, and Mabel was alone with the children, her spirits were so cheerful at the prospect opening before her, that she interested her young charge at once; and that night established the three as good friends.

Mabel could easily see that Mrs. Burnish had none of the untiring energy of her mother-in-law. She was, in fact, overpowered by the activity of the family. Her health was not good, and her temperament inclined her to quietude. But she was constantly reminded that the Burnish family lived for the benefit of others; and a certain idea of the importance of keeping up with the demands made on the well known philanthropy of the house, caused her to acquiesce in many plans of benevolence she would often have been well content to let alone. She was, in truth, one of those common characters who take their tone from those around, even to the overcoming of natural predilections. She made herself some amends, by often delegating to others many of the matters she professed to undertake. A favorite maid had, for years, performed her charities, and, when this woman, who had vowed to live entirely for her dear lady, deceived her, and privately married the butler, keeping the mistress she adored in ignorance of the fact until it could be concealed no longer, Mrs. Burnish transferred her confidence to the nursery-governess who had preceded Mabel, and was also left in disgrace, as favorites are wont to do. The present lady's-maid, Mrs. Gabb, might have filled the vacant office of confidante—was, indeed, very near the distinction—when it occurred to Mrs. Burnish, on the very first interview with Mabel (for none are so active as the indolent in finding substitutes), that here was a superior person, who would be able to take a higher department than merely the executive in reference to charities. So she

was as pleased as the young governess herself; and as to what Lady Burnish had said about beauty, Mrs. Burnish was one of those ladies who never see much to admire in the looks of others. Besides, a poor governess! What did it matter whether she was tall or short, or dark or fair, so that her general appearance did not disgrace the family?

Had Mrs. Burnish been possessed of much discernment, she would have been startled out of her indifference on the subject of Mabel's looks, after witnessing, at the first breakfast, the gaze of gratified surprise with which her eldest son, Mr. Delamere Burnish, recognized Mabel. As to the head of the household, he had no recollection of having seen the young governess before. He gave her a cordial welcome, scanned her face an instant with an earnest look, that reminded Mabel of his mother, and then turned to his pile of letters and newspapers, and sipped his coffee in silence.

"Have you heard Delamere, how that man is who jammed his hand?" said Mr. Burnish, abruptly looking up from his paper.

"Dead, sir!"

"Indeed—poor fellow! I was afraid it would be so." "My dear," he added, addressing his wife, "you must do something for the widow."

"My list of such cases is very full," said Mrs. Burnish. "There were two men died in Bartholomew's last month. One with only a scratch I'm told; and both have left large families. Isn't there a contingent fund, or a something, among the men themselves, Mr. Burnish?"

"Oh yes! certainly, there is; but, you know, I like my people to know that I take a personal interest in their well-being, and a word from you to the widow will be of the greatest consolation."

"Oh! to be sure; I sympathize deeply with the poor thing; only these cases occur so often. It seems to me our men never do recover."

"Cousin Shafton Keen would tell you the reason of that," said Delamere Burnish, with a half laugh.

"Oh! I've not much opinion of the judgment of Shafton Keen," retorted Mrs. Burnish, but, before the words were well out of her mouth, the door of the breakfast room was thrown open, and a servant announced—"Mr. Shafton Keen." The owner of this name, a slight young man, with dark eyes, that lighted up an intelligent, but not handsome, face, came in, hastily uttering an apology for calling so early, but added, laughing, "I've come begging, of course. Its our Board day at the hospital, and, as the cases from the brewery have been numerous and heavy of late, I've called to ask an extra subscription."

"My mother wants to know, Shafton, how it is that all the men die, however trivial the accident that they enter with?" said Delamere.

"Plethora, dear aunt! If the men, like the horses, ate the grains instead of drinking the beer, they might be fat, and not full of inflammation and bad humours. These London athletes are a sort of human puff-paste."

"Ate the grain, Shafton? how absurd," said Mrs. Burnish. "Just like you;" making, at the same time, a signal for Mabel and the children to withdraw. Mr. Delamere Burnish opened the door for his little sisters, and bowed them and their governess out of the room with elaborate politeness—a circumstance that did not escape the quick eyes of Mr. Shafton Keen.

As Mabel passed through the hall she noticed that it was filled with poor people, and she learned that they were applicants for the aid of the different charities to which Mr. Burnish subscribed. How blessed, thought Mabel, to have both the means and the will to do good on so large a scale. She saw, then, only a part, and a very small part, of the operations of the house of Burnish.

In a very few days the young governess fell into the usual routine of the house. The children did not occupy her whole time. Besides her own two hours' walk with them, from four to six every fine evening, they walked two hours in the morning with their maid, at which time Mabel wrote letters, or saw poor applicants, or visited charitable cases for Mrs. Burnish, and liked to be so employed. Then in the evenings, after the children had gone to bed, she found time for the improvement of her own mind by reading; and a good library was kindly opened to her use by Mr. Burnish. Altogether, she had reason to think herself fortunate, as to the surface of affairs, at all events.

Some clouds slightly shaded the brightness of her sky. She had read in the newspapers the trial of the woman for stabbing, and was relieved to find that, though sentence of death was recorded, it would not be carried into effect, but imprisonment for life would be substituted. What would become of the children of the murderer and the murdered? was a question that Mabel could easily put; but the answer? In one instance, it was answered in the very paper that told the mother's doom. There was, in the police intelligence, the case of the eldest boy, taken up for stealing, and summarily sent by the magistrate for three months to the House of Correction. "Ah!" sighed Mabel, "this is the way that the ranks of the criminals are recruited. Drinking—passion—poverty—destitution—crime." With a pang, Mabel read the father's testimony that until his wife drank, he had a happy home, and his children a good mother.

Mabel's other perplexities arose from causes she could hardly admit or define. It seemed odd to her that Mr. Delamere Burnish so often met his little sisters on their return with her from their afternoon walk. And though he was quiet silent every morning at the breakfast table, he was generally