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THE LITTLE MOURNER.

In a miserable hovel, on the outskirts of the city, upon an old pallet of straw, lay the pale and emaciated form of a drunkard's wife, counting the fleeting moments of her fast-failing existence, and breathing out her soul in accents of prayer to Him who is no respecter of persons, in behalf of her wretched husband and forsaken child.

The night was exceedingly cold, and the keen, chilling wind whistled round the abode of poverty with unusual fierceness, while a few cheerless beams from the remaining coals of an expiring fire threw a gloomy light upon the dying woman as she lay upon the humble couch of death, and exhibited the wasted form of one that once moved in the high circles of respectability—the admitted of all—and looked upon as an accomplished young lady, worthy the implicit confidence and warmest esteem of the good.

But, alas! how fickle are all human hopes—how evanescent are life's sweetest joys! Sad indeed must be a change like this, to one who never dreamed of misery. Once that face, like the bosom of the placid lake, when reflecting the golden sunbeam, was radiant with the smile that tells of inward bliss. There did exist a period when not a shade of sadness or a cloud of doubt and gloom rose up to darken the sky of youth's gay scenes; when the pang of grief had never yet left its mark upon her fair countenance—cheerfulness then made glad the social circle, and happiness—that happiness which softens the perplexing cares of life—had its shrine in the young bride's heart. But of late years, the fire which burnt so brilliantly upon the altar of domestic bliss, had gone out, and even the altar itself had been thrown down by the very hand that reared it. And now the wrinkled brow and faded cheek—the languid and sunken eye—the blanched and furrowed forehead—the bloodless lip, faltering tongue and palsied hand, all told the sad tale of a wife's crushed hopes and a mother's heart-breaking grief.

None but a wife can tell the agony she feels, when he to whom the vows of ceaseless fidelity and undying love were pledged, forsakes her society for the company of those lost to all sense of shame or feelings of remorse. None but a mother can describe the torture which rends her bosom, when the husband and father not only neglects, (for that is bad enough) but actually deprives his own child of food necessary to sustain nature, and clothing requisite to shield it from the inclemency of the weather, merely in order to satiate a created thirst for rum, and thereby enrich, adorn, and exalt the household of the heartless rum-seller! Where then was that husband and father at the time our tale commenced. Those who are better acquainted with the haunts of a lover of strong drink can best answer the question.

So completely had he become a slave to the insatiable thirst for rum, that even death at his own fireside could not break the spell; and upon the very night of which we speak, he could withstand the last entreaties of a dying wife, and leave her bed-side in order to mingle with the companions of his degradation, and drink in the liquid ruin which not only consumes the mortal frame and kills the physical energies, but also fires the gilded city of the intellect, and wraps in an awful conflagration the diamond temple of the soul! Fearful thought! How countless is the sum which a drunkard pays for the short gratification

of an artificial appetite, and how often does he forfeit a jewel beyond all price—for when once lost, it is irrecoverable.

The night was dark, cold and windy, and the old delapidated frame gave but a poor protection from the pelting storm which raged without, while the few remaining coals of fire upon the broken hearth only served to throw a faint light upon the haggard countenance of the invalid. There was no one present to minister to the wants of the dying woman. She felt that life was short—its sands nearly run out; that soon, very soon, she must bid adieu to all that earth held dear or the heart prized high—must kiss for the last time the warm and rosy cheek of her little daughter—leave the idol of her heart to the protection of a busy and heedless world. The thought was too painful for reflection: but it would present itself to view, and she could not banish it from her mind. To whom could she look as the friend and guardian of her child? Not to the world—all was stern and forbidding there! Not to her husband, for he had proved himself recreant to the most solemn of all obligations; and even when disease had broken down her strength, and the shafts of death had been levelled at her heart, he paused only for a moment in his mad career, but would not yield the baneful cause of all her misery. To whom then could she look? To Him whose mercies fail not—the orphan's friend—and to Him she did look.

It was nine o'clock, and yet she was alone. The husband was still absent. Mary (for that was the child's name) was sleeping soundly by her mother's side, unconscious that death was at the door, and about to deprive her of the only true friend she possessed on earth. Mrs. N—— felt the sadness of her condition. She seemed forsaken when most she needed friendship's soothing voice; and he, whose proper place was at her side, and who should have been there to speak the words of love and kindness, was spending his moments—nay, hours—in the abodes of ruin, while the strength of his own faithful wife was fast failing under the weight of death's heavy hand. She well knew that every moment of time, as it hurried on into the shade of the past, was only bringing her nearer to the brink of the tomb: "Oh!" thought the lone, deserted one, "if I could only see William before I die, and be permitted to whisper my last warning in his ear—tell him how deeply he has wronged me, how sincerely I forgive him, and how fervently I pray for him, surely he would not then turn away from me. Or if I only had some kind friend to whom I could make a last request, I then should die content. But none pities, none cares for me—and here is my poor little girl, none will pity her! Oh! how can I leave her a poor and friendless orphan. She dreams not of the storms before her; sleep on, sweet babe, perhaps before these eyes again open, thy fond mother will be in the invisible world. Alas! alas! it is hard—my heart yearns for thee; I know the waves of opposition which thou wilt have to buffet; thou wilt then mourn for thy friend; if I could only take thee with me to the sunny climes of everlasting blessedness—but—" It was too painful to think upon, and tear after tear coursed her cheek, pale from the ravages of disease, until she sobbed aloud. So agonizing were the deep feelings of her broken spirit, that she could not restrain their audible utterance, and soon her loud sobbings disturbed the sweet slumber of the darling object of her