

night it is enough to kill you to be watching about in this bleak place."

A voice with despair in its tone quietly replied. "Nothing will kill me, or I should have been dead long ago." There was a sort of laugh—a hollow ghost of a laugh—that chilled me to the bone, as the words ceased. Suddenly a throng of people, some of them women, came out of the public-house, and the crouched form rose and glided along at the side of the wall. I passed the rabble who were shouting out ribald songs, wild, odious, joyless laughter of women's voices adding a sort of chorus to the strain. I saw a tall man among them, a large tawdry woman was clinging to his arm. The light of the lamp was on his face—it was Warner. I glanced at his companion, and my mental comment was—"If that poor girl you once called wife is dead, the virago on your arm is better suited to you." I hastened on, anxious to put as wide a distance between me and a creature I could not look on without loathing; but for some streets I heard the shout of the revellers, rending with their foul cries the quiet of the night.

Next day there were rumours of a murder, one of the worst of murders, a murder called of old, and still in our law books named 'TREASON!' A wife had murdered her husband in their own home. The wretched, guilty creature had shed her husband's blood on the very hearth that ought to have been sacred to love and fidelity. Men looked calmly stern, women bitterly enraged, as the tidings of this murder spread. I was no reader of newspaper horrors, but when such a crime came nearly to one's own door, I turned more eagerly than usual to the local journal laid on my breakfast-table the following day, and the first thing that startled me was the name—Warner. For a moment I thought of the woman I had seen hanging on Warner's arm, and a kind of stern contempt filled my mind. 'A drunken brawl: no wonder he ended so,' was my mental comment. But as I read, what was my surprise to find that it was *Ann*, the 'Annie' I remembered—the gentle, loving wife and mother, whose sweetness of temper had been the drunken boast of her husband. How could it be possible?

The murder took place so near the time of the assizes, that the trial followed the inquest and the committal in quick succession. There was no one to urge delay for the procuring of evidence, or the arranging of the defence. The evidence was clear, the accused was poor. I attended the trial. The court was very full—many ladies there, most of them vehemently against the prisoner. Oh, ladies! if you obtained what some of you deem your right—permission equally with man to practise law—few of you would prefer being tried by a female judge or a female jury. It is a wrong, say some, that woman is not tried by her peers—that trial by jury in its strict sense does not exist for her. If this be a wrong, methinks woman would cherish this wrong more than most of her rights.

The prisoner was poorly dressed. She had evidently, though still young in years, lost all care for her appearance; despair had done its work. She looked once timidly and wonderingly round the court, then collapsed into herself a still, white effigy of a woman.

How much of the proceedings were understood by her can never be known. Occasionally her fingers twitched at her old shawl, once she pressed her little bony hands hard on her eyes; I felt certain those tearless eyes were so dry and hot, that she pressed down the lids to ease them.

but those around me said, 'What a hardened creature!' All the whispers I heard, and they were in female voices, 'soft in the vowels,' were—'What stolid indifference!' 'There's no tears; she puts up her hands to her eyes to pretend to wipe away the tears; she does not shed.' 'Faugh! I cannot bear to look at her hands.' 'What a bad countenance!' 'Wasted to the bone with evil passions!' &c.

There was no hesitancy and no delay in the trial: all was clear. The husband had returned home late, intoxicated certainly; but this wretched woman, this base wife, had waylaid him—managed to enter the cottage they occupied a few minutes before him; he followed and fell down across the fire-place, and she had thrown a heavy smoothing-iron on his temple as he lay, and killed him instantly.

There was a feeble attempt by the counsel for the prisoner to make out that the fall might have caused death. The surgeon's testimony entirely disproved that. There was a wound inflicted with the strange weapon employed; 'not so deep as a well, nor so broad as a church door; but enough.'

Except the man's fall, no sound had been heard by the other lodgers in the house, and the tragedy was discovered by a woman noticing a small stream of blood that had run under the door into the passage. She had entered and found the man dead and cold, and the murderess crouched up in a corner of the room, looking 'calmly,' they said, at her fearful work.

And so there was no doubt; the word 'GUILTY' was spoken with less sorrow than common; and in the court there was a murmur—could it be of approval? Yes! human justice was satisfied—the traitress was condemned.

After the thrill of the moment, I was not either angry or surprised at that approving murmur. It was outraged fidelity that spoke. Marriage—honourable, tender, holy—had been violated by the red hand of murder: the ties, dear as life, strong as death, had been rent in twain, and society rose indignant to avenge the crime. Sentence was pronounced. There was the same stillness in the prisoner. The gasler touched her. She started like one awakened from a dream, and her frame being light and small, she stepped down quickly. With deep disgust a voice near me said—'She actually seems to "trip away".'

I went home fevered with the scene. I had looked below the surface; I had known the daily death that miserable woman had endured—the many murders her intemperate husband had perpetrated; how he had slain her hopes, her health, her peace, her mother's joy, her wifely comfort. Yet that her hand should have dealt the awful retributive blow seemed very frightful.

I pondered, too, on human law, and mourned that it should be most insecure where for the safety of society it should be least so. All whom I conversed with believed the extreme penalty of the law would be inflicted. All thought it just it should be. I urged the conduct of the husband, and was, I confess, startled at the reply; 'Oh! allow a man's bad conduct to be pleaded in extenuation, and you'll have plenty of murders.' Pondering this case, my mind went through a ghastly chronicle. 'The glorious uncertainty of the law' does not cease with the verdict, it extends to the punishment. I remembered that a man, a few years back, destroyed a woman on Battersea Bridge—a most hideous murder; no doubt, and no extenuation in the case, and yet that man was reprieved. A French