

## KINDLY SPEECH.

A gentle Dove denotes the Love,  
And tongues of fire the Power,  
That win the lost for heaven above,  
And here with goodness dower

No words can tell how strong the spell  
Of truth in kindly speech,  
O'er hearts that wrath would but repel,  
And love ne'er fails to reach

It kindles life, it quenches strife,  
It maketh hate to cease,  
And souls, with sinful sorrows rife,  
It fills with holy peace.

Lord, I beseech, that I may teach  
With love like thine to me;  
And so, with wise and loving speech,  
Bring many a heart to Thee.

THOMAS DAVIS.

## BLUEBEARD'S CLOSET.

*(Continued.)*

There stood the quiet bottles, a very common-looking, every-day sort of sight, and nothing else was to be seen but the shelves that held them, and a cork-screw depending from a nail. My eyes glanced downward to the floor, and on it was certainly a broad red stain, but I knew its cause too well to be alarmed at it. I hastened to explain.

'If any one has told you a foolish tale about that red mark, uncle, I can only say that they have spoken untruly. Archibald told me all about it; he had the misfortune to break a bottle one day, and the port wine flew about, and upon the floor; Susan has not managed to scrub it away, that's all.'

'Pooh,' replied my uncle, shortly. 'Do you think I am speaking of a matter of wine-stains? It is blood-stains I see, not that sort of thing.' And he put his foot contemptuously upon it. 'Has it never struck you, Henrietta, why I never take wine or ale or spirits? Why such a closet as this is not to be seen in my house? You have been over it often enough to know that it is so.'

'Because you are a teetotaller,' I stammered, 'and'

'You are so odd and absurd in so many other ways, that it is no wonder you are odd in that. Is not that what you wished to say? I daresay it is. I know what you fine, well brought up young ladies think. A little wine is so nice, so perfectly proper, too, that only the bears and bores of society refuse it and talk against it. But have you no serious moments? Do you never look around you with open eyes? Have you never thought on all the evils and misery wine-drinking brings even in circles like your own? How it dulls the eyes, and reddens the nose, and enlarges the waist, and turns the lady, that should be the quintessence of all that is graceful and beautiful and good, into a coarse ill-mannered sloven and vixen, an embodiment of vice, without modesty and shame?'

'But,' I pleaded, 'you see things so strongly. Those are only the exceptions. Hundreds and thousands take wine without the least harm.'

'That I do not admit,' was his reply. 'But, supposing it were so, how many hundreds and thousands perish, in longer or shorter periods, through its seduction, and by one of the most terrible of deaths, the double death, soul and body perishing at once? And do you call hundreds and thousands exceptions? If so they are exceptions that do anything but prove the rule.'

His words were certainly very strong and decided. His lance had no mercy in it. But I was in some degree thrust proof, for I had years ago been supplied, by my father's aid, and that of many friends and acquaintance, with a tolerable armour of unbelief, and a spirit of opposition to whatever my strange un-

worldly uncle Edward might say or insist upon. As to the blood and the murder and the Bluebeard closet, I understood him now. They were but some of his usual exaggerations. When my uncle paints a picture he uses no middle tints, it is all bright lights and the heaviest of heavy shadows with him—an intense lightning and thunder sort of chiaro oscuro. One can but shrug one's shoulders eternally and pass on. I suppose he saw some of the outward tokens of this internal shoulder-lifting: at all events, he suspected it. He turned away from the closet, with a grieved air that, I will confess, cut me to the heart, for I would not willingly annoy him.

In a repenting mood I took him by the hand. 'You wish me well, dear uncle, I know, and, though we may have differences of opinion, we can always understand each other. I will ever love you and respect your opinion, as yours, though I may not be able to make it my own.'

'I do not wish you to respect an opinion only because it is mine,' was his answer, in a milder voice. 'I would much rather you would respect it, for the truth that is in it. My words or my opinions are of no moment unless truth dictates them. And when I tell you that those bottles contain the seven devils that were cast out of Mary Magdalene, and that from that closet has proceeded suicide and murder, I tell you a simple unexaggerated truth though you do not believe me. You say you did not know Adeline Grant, your husband's first wife: I did, both before her marriage and since, and have now in my possession some words she wrote down that it will be well for you to read. Your husband, too, was not unknown to me in his younger days, though I daresay he has forgotten me, and when I give you this record of a past life, once so dear to him, it is from the best of motives, both for your and his welfare. Will you promise to read it?'

I promised: and he took from his pocket and gave to me a small roll of paper, containing a manuscript of not the cleanest description. As I opened it, I read on the outside, 'If Archibald marries again, let his second wife see this.—A. G.'

With trembling fingers I held the roll, a sudden fear possessed me, for it seemed to me that my fate was contained in it, and a certain unwillingness to peruse it took possession of me. I was happy now, why should I disturb my happiness by reading of past miseries? Archibald seemed to me the personification of a good husband, why should I needlessly remove the mask, if mask there were? And, besides, what might not these ill-written lines contain?

My uncle saw my hesitation and divined its cause. 'Do not be afraid,' he said, encouragingly: 'though I have called Archibald Grant a Bluebeard, he has been one very unintentionally, and there is nothing in that paper that will make your husband less dear to you. Though I have been hard in my speech to you, and of you, I think you love him, and when a woman loves, there are no faults and follies she will not forgive. Go, take it with you to your chamber, and read when I am gone, alone, and at your leisure.'

I have done as he said, and now the manuscript lies before me, its contents all revealed to me. I transcribe it here.

'10th of June, 18— Ten years ago to day was my wedding day. I was then twenty: I am now only thirty, yet the doctor tells me I must die, and I have seen trouble enough in this world to say, "Let me die, then, it is better so." And yet the hereafter! what will that be? Were it not for that awful hereafter, how gladly would I die.'

'Ten years ago I was young and healthy and beautiful. Now, I am old,

yes, old at thirty, and worn out—the prey of a disease that must soon be fatal; and, as for beauty, let any one look at me now, and say what beauty there is remaining about this pinched, sallow face, these sunken eyes, this drawn mouth? Only the grave-worm would think me beautiful.

'We were very happy the first year or two of our marriage; Archibald was kind and indulgent, too indulgent; all I did, and all I said, was right in his eyes and perfectly good; and long, long after I had ceased to be a sober, virtuous wife, he shut his eyes to my faults and sins, and would not believe in them. He honoured me as his true wife long after the real crown of honour had fallen from my head low down beneath my feet, and though he guarded me not from my besetting sin, nay, even ignorantly led me into it, I have nothing but words of love to bestow upon him.

'We kept much company, for my husband was inclined to hospitality, and I was fond of society. Indulged and flattered and admired, I thought of little but my own pleasure; and, when seated as hostess at a plentiful table, did not deny myself any luxury, either of meats or drinks. I had no desire to be abstemious, why should I? The taste of wine was pleasant to me, for at my father's house I had been brought up to like it, and with the rest of the family had partaken of it daily. There could be no harm in it therefore, for my father was a member of a Christian church, of regular habits, and would not have suffered his children to use what he considered injurious or tending to bad morals. With his example and my mother's before me, for at the paternal home no one believed in or practised abstinence, I thought I was but pursuing the good old track of safety and honour long after I had passed the boundary line of temperance. I had no misgivings, but went on in my ignorance with a little more, a very little more each day of the dangerous stimulant, till my husband one day laughingly drew my attention to the quantity I had taken at dinner. Blushing with mingled shame and anger, I referred to his own liberal draughts of whiskey, and asked him if he grudged me a paltry glass or two of wine.

'No, my dear, neither a glass or two nor a bottle or two, if you like; you shall never say I am stingy; besides, it makes you so charmingly rosy. Here's to your health, my love.' And he drank off the remainder of his tumbler of spirits with a smile on his lips. How easily he might have controlled me then: why did he not? He must have known the danger more than I did at that time, yet he put no arm out to save me, he even encouraged me to my ruin. But why do I blame him? He was walking the same path himself, and no doubt thought I should have the same power to keep clear of the precipice that he had so far always managed to preserve.

'In awhile, business called him to be much away from home, and he was generally absent the greater part of the day. This naturally brought less society of other kinds to the house. Indolent by nature, and accustomed to be amused and flattered, I needed some excitement to pass the weary hours, and found it in the gentle exhilaration of intoxicating drinks. When time lay heavy on my hands, I soon discovered that I could make it lighter by mixing it with wine. The leaden moments lost their character and took wings when married to alcohol. And now, a closet that was in the dining-room, and whose key was in my possession, and where my husband kept a little store of wine and spirits, became a snare to me. I could go to this closet quietly and take there a glass or two of wine or spirits without being seen by prying eyes, and, locking the door, could then go away with no tell-tale scent let abroad in din-

ing or drawing-room for Juliette, the parlour-maid, to discover.

'When my husband returned home in the evening, he always found me cheerful and merry, with cheeks flushed just a little, and eyes twinkling bright as diamonds, to use his own expression, and he did not suspect the dangerous ally I had called in to aid me in passing away the tedious hours of his absence. So I was encouraged to go on. My mother was the first to perceive the strong hold the love of intoxicating drinks was getting upon me, and, with careful, motherly love, pointed out to me my danger, and besought me to greater temperance. I promised her, with some tears of shame, to refrain from excess for the future, but her own example of two glasses a day overcame the transitory effect of her precepts, for when with her I had taken a little, I knew not how to restrain the morbid craving that little aroused in me for more, and no sooner was she gone than my feet hastened almost mechanically to the too convenient closet. There I drowned my sense of shame, and the memory of her fears and admonitions, very speedily and effectually in so small a vessel as a wine glass.

'If my husband had but kept the key of the closet himself, all the misery that ensued might have been prevented. Or, much better still, if he had had no such closet; and wine and brandy and spirits had been exiled from the house for evermore,—ah, how different might all have been! Once or twice I have been inclined to give up to him the fatal key, tell him of my temptation, and beg him to remove me far away from the fearful snare; but my courage always failed, or rather, my evil appetite was become too powerful for my conscience to control. And so the days went on, and, as on a fast flowing river, I was borne swiftly and surely to destruction.

'In awhile a constant craving sickness pursued me. Too well I knew its cause. Low spirits, hysterics, nervousness, these were the names it went by, but the true name was drink-fever, that consumed the vital energies, while deceitfully it appeared to feed their flame, and kept me ever swinging backwards and forwards between 'the opposite poles of undue excitement, and extreme prostration.' Why do I write all this down? It is intense misery to me to go over again the memory of my downfall, and in some sort I do it as a penance. Much more, however, is it in the hope that by so doing the remaining oil of my life-lamp may show to others, if never so feebly, the dark and slimy steps by which I slipped down to bodily death and spiritual loss, and so they may be warned in time. We had still occasional visitors at our house, though my husband's business engagements, and my own ill-health, and growing indifference to fresh faces, made it a much quieter place than in former years. Among the rest was a neighbor, Colonel Baynes. Accomplished, handsome, a perfect gentleman, in the world's meaning of the term, he made himself especially pleasant, and soon especially dangerous to me. I was still what was called beautiful, and he, a libertine at heart, praised the beauty he deliberately intended to destroy. But had I not first given way to the seduction of wine, his seductions would have passed me by harmless. Do you ask me if I loved him? Ask the fly if she loves the spider when he lures her to his web! No, I had no love for him. But I was charmed by him, fascinated with him, though at times a strange horror seized me when in his presence, and an intense loathing, the last struggles of my higher nature. And, even now, it appears to me so strange that I should have ever cared for one look he gave me, or have listened for a moment to his polite accents and impure talk, that I can only account for it by believing that at that time I could never have been really and truly sober.