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Dangers of Dining Out.

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[Frederick Bond was a physician in a country town, who commenced his career in most flattering circumstances, but who was much injured in every way by habits of intemperance, acquired amongst a circle of fashionable acquaintances, with whom he was in the habit of dining out. Mrs. Bond whose maiden name was Stanley, helplessly deplores her husband's degradation, but still clings to the same fashionable society, notwithstanding the remonstrances of Mrs. West, a Christian lady, wife of her husband's partner. Sir James and Lady Mornford, are the chief personages of the fashionable circle alluded to, and the latter has been secretly suffering from a cancer for which she wishes an operation performed in her husband's absence, to which course Mr. West is averse.]

Not all these arguments, however, were sufficient to induce Mr. West to consent. He could not be made to understand that the life of a married woman, and a mother, was exclusively her own property; and when pressed almost beyond his power of resistance, he at last formed the design of writing to Sir James himself, and ascertaining whether it was really true, as Lady Mornford so often told him, that Sir James was quite willing the operation should be performed, provided he was not at home, nor aware of the time of its taking place.

It was perhaps well for Lady Mornford's patience and forbearance, that she knew nothing, at the time, of this well-meant interference; which, though conducted with the greatest prudence and caution, entirely failed in the effect it was intended to produce. The letter remained at the post-office of a little country village, to which it was directed, while Sir James extended his excursions, day after day, farther up into a wild and thinly peopled district, intent only upon the amusement of the moment, and little dreaming of the events which were transpiring at home.

In the meantime, Lady Mornford had laid her own schemes; and sending for her doctors one morning, she received them with an open letter in her hand, and, with an appearance of the greatest gravity, began to inform them that her fate was decided, for she had that morning received from her husband his most full and entire permission to proceed according to the direction of her own judgment, and the advice of her medical friends.

Perceiving that Mr. West was still incredulous, she opened the letter, and read aloud in a clear and unflinching voice, what appeared to be a confirmation of all the facts she had stated.

Mr. West could doubt no longer; but still remembering his own letter, he begged permission to wait a sufficient length of time for it to have been received and answered. This time expired, and again he was obliged to appear before Lady Mornford. She had received a second letter from her husband, confirming the last, and was proceeding to read it aloud, when Mr. West, forgetting the intended secrecy of his own share in these transactions, asked, with great simplicity and earnestness, whether Sir James acknowledged the receipt of his letter of the seventh.

Lady Mornford started, and for a moment her self-possession forsook her. But she had tact enough to recover her lost ground, and, shaking her head at Mr. West, she added with a smile, "Yes, indeed, he does acknowledge this act of treachery, for which I can hardly forgive you. He begs me also to express to you his gratitude, and to assure you with what confidence he commits me to your skill and care. He even goes so far as to say, that he shall not think of returning home until he hears farther intelligence, and begs Mr. Bond will not lose a moment in letting him know when all is over."

Lady Mornford was so prompt and well practised a deceiver, that the single-heartedness of Mr. West was entirely imposed upon; and though Frederick Bond, who knew her better, entertained some lurking suspicions of her sincerity, he kept his own counsel, while both prepared to discharge their duty in the ablest and most effectual manner.

It was a matter of astonishment with the doctors, how a woman, on some occasions so weak, and always so volatile as Lady Mornford, could acquit herself under such circumstances with so much calmness and decision. But they had no opportunity of watching her through the day, and they consequently saw not those violent hysterical attacks to which she had lately become increasingly subject, and which, she believed, and taught all around her to believe, nothing but stimulants would subdue. Thus her habits were gradually assuming a character the most injurious to her constitution under present circumstances; but while the doctors were somewhat startled by the feverish state of her pulse, they were inclined to attribute it almost entirely to the excitable state of her feelings, and believed that her whole frame would be restored to a more quiet and healthy tone, so soon as her mind should be relieved from the burden of her distressing malady.

Thus all parties went on with their preparations. Lady Mornford spent much of her time in writing, though she generally concluded her task by tearing what she had written, and committing it to the fire. Perhaps the hardest duty she had to perform, was that of taking leave of her children, who were to be sent with their governess to spend some weeks at a neighbouring watering-place. Still hard as this duty was, it must be gone through; and now the morning of their departure had arrived, and the carriage was at the door, and yet their arms were around her neck, and she could not bring herself to kiss them for the last time.

Lady Mornford had always been more like a sister than a mother to her children. Juvenile in her habit, and easily diverted by the frolic of the moment, she had joined with avidity in all their sports; and though she had lately, with a kind of fretfulness entirely foreign to her nature, sometimes driven them from her side, it had only been to receive them in her altered moods, with more affection, and to win them back to love her better than before.

It is said that all have their idols—that every individual of the human race has some object of attachment, for which they thirst and strive more than for any other. With Lady Mornford this object was simply to be loved—to be loved for the sake of the comfort and support which the affection of those around her afforded. This object she pursued with so much eagerness, that rather than even suffer a momentary alienation from the hearts of her children, she risked their temporal and eternal happiness by indulging every wish, and studying to bestow on them every day some new gratification more welcome than the last.

How far this system was calculated to defeat its own end, it is unnecessary here to state. One of its results alone will suffice; for while Lady Mornford's children regarded their mother as the source and fountain of all their enjoyments, they were prepared to cast off both their love and their allegiance, at any moment, when those enjoyments should cease.

"And now," said Lady Mornford to her oldest daughter, a beautiful girl of fifteen, "you are going to the pleasant sea-shore, to wander on the beach, and enjoy the bright sun-sets that you love so much. For your father, as I entreat you not to forget your drawing. Here is the book I have long wished to give you. Be sure that you find time to look at it, to gladden his heart when he returns."

"For you, Caroline, I have provided a piano. Here is the music you want. Let nothing interfere with your lessons, or your practice. It is possible your father may want you to play to him more than he has ever done before."

"How so?"

"Never mind, attend to your music, and make him happy in any way you can."