

'I am sorry you like it, Millie,' Lena replied; 'but that is just the danger. There are many things we like that are not good for us, and I am sure you will suffer by this liking.'

'What do you know about it? You are not a doctor or a professor, and I told you that Dr. Chambers said it was the very thing I needed to give me a fillip for my food.'

'I don't profess to be an authority, dear; but I read and hear a good deal about what alcohol is. I am sure it is better to be on the safe side. There are a good many physicians nowadays who tell their patients that fresh air and exercise are far better than stimulants.'

'Is Fred Leeson one of that sort? Because if you make an obedient wife you won't need anybody to lecture you on the subject.'

'Don't get spiteful, Millie. I don't want to lecture you. Only I don't wish my sister to come under the influence of a temptation she is not strong enough to resist; and as for Fred, he has scarcely mentioned the subject.'

'Well, you had better talk to him about it, instead of scolding me,' returned Millie, in quite an angry tone.

Mrs. Mordaunt was usually a good-tempered person, and the irritation she now displayed was but another token of the evil influence of her new habit. She had an underlying consciousness that she was doing wrong, and she evinced a growing desire to hide its extent from those about her. She began to restrain herself in the quantity she drank when her husband or sister was present, and only the more revelled in the enjoyment of secret drinking. Thus, for a while they were somewhat blind to the mischief which planted its roots more tenaciously than does an oak in the soil beneath. Millie's cheeks lost their glow of health and color, and she became nervous and more easily disturbed.

This developed into a form of hysteria, and her husband was greatly alarmed one evening on his return home at finding her in her room, sobbing violently.

'What is the matter, dear?' he inquired gently.

But he could make nothing of her. She sobbed afresh; then spoke to him bitterly, and declined to dress for dinner. Mordaunt good naturedly suggested that he should send for Dr. Chambers.

No; she would not have the doctor. She would have nothing. And the young husband went down to his lonely dinner with a heavy heart and a poor appetite.

He asked himself what it could all mean, and as he lifted a glass of port to his lips the thought flashed across his mental vision—

'Can it be due to her fondness for wine?'

He put the glass down untouched, and made one of those sudden resolutions which are as milestones on life's journey.

'Not another glass will I take!' 'What a difference would have been made in his life and happiness had he formed that decision one year earlier. Still, it was better now than not at all. It might help him to save his wife, and if not, to save others.'

He went to his wife's room shortly after, and found her dozing. When she awoke he induced her to take a sandwich and some coffee. Both passed a troublous night, but he was relieved, when morning came, to find no worse condition in Millie than that of a severe headache.

A week later there was a repetition of

the scene, and a month later his firstborn was ushered into the world, its inheritance a love of drink.

CHAPTER IV.—LEESON'S RESOLVE.

If Millicent had been 'spiteful,' as Lena suggested in her reference to Fred Leeson, it was not because she bore him any illwill. Having realized the sweets of an 'engagement,' in which she had the joys and pleasures of love without its responsibilities, she was delighted when Lena, who was only a year younger than herself, whispered the news that Fred Leeson had proposed to her.

'Of course, we can't marry yet awhile,' she said, 'because Fred is only a hospital assistant; but I think him very clever, and don't doubt he will soon get a better appointment. And neither of us is an old woman yet; are we, dear?'

'One-and-twenty can't be considered old; I am sure,' sympathetically replied Millicent.

Fred Leeson was as clever as he was handsome, and that is saying a good deal. He was a universal favorite in the hospital ward amongst the nurses and officials, and in any house to which he paid visits. He was the very life of the garden party at which he and Lena had met for the first time, and it was mutual love at sight; or perhaps at speech. Leeson was struck with the frank, lively disposition of Lena, which never bordered on forwardness or impertinence, and she admired his true manliness.

He soon found other opportunities of meeting her, the more easily because of the pleasure they gave to the lady, and in three months he had not only discovered that his affection was returned, but was in possession of her promise willingly to wait until he was in a position to offer her marriage. The whole matter was explained to Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, and Leeson became a welcome visitor at 'The Lodge.'

Some time after the interview between the two sisters just narrated he had arranged to escort Lena to a concert in town. Leeson dined at Richmond, and noticed that her face wore a graver aspect than was its wont. She tried to be pleasant and cheerful, but the effort was apparent. As soon as the opportunity presented itself he inquired—

'What is the matter with you, my lady? You are hardly yourself to-night.'

'Oh, Fred, have you noticed it? How sharp you are! It is not about myself that I am troubled, but about Millie. I am afraid she has developed a strong liking for alcoholic liquors.'

'I am sorry for that,' he replied, with sympathy; 'but the habit is new, surely. I have not observed it.'

'You have not seen her much lately,' said Lena; 'but when I mentioned the matter she spoke very crossly, and wanted to know if you had been lecturing me on the subject.'

'—And of course, you were conscientiously able to tell her that I never "lecture" you on any subject, on any pretence whatever?'

'Now, don't tease me,' answered Lena, for, as a matter of fact, she had more than once said, 'Don't lecture me,' when he was combining a little advice with information.

'Well, somebody will have to lecture your sister, that is clear,' he observed.

'Do you really think lecturing will help her?' inquired Lena.

'No, sweetheart. I don't think it will. She is more likely to take umbrage at our intrusion and our assumption of superiority. Besides, it is a usual habit with women to indulge in secret drinking when once it gains the mastery.'

'The habit is so dreadful in a woman!' Lena murmured.

'It is distressing in either sex, but all experience shows that a woman finds it almost impossible to eradicate the longing.'

'Then I suppose you are glad that I have signed the pledge?' she inquired, with a wistful look into his face.

'I don't care whether you have signed the pledge, but I am glad that you are an abstainer, and I hope you will always remain so.'

'And you, Fred, are you an abstainer?' she ventured this query, not knowing whether he was pledged or not, and thinking that the future would be easier to both if both were of one mind and one practice in the matter.

'Now, that is driving the nail home,' he replied, with a smile. 'I don't think I can say that I am either theoretically, or practically, an entire abstainer. I suppose I take a glass of wine, say, once a month; but it is only to maintain sociability with some of the friends I meet.'

Lena walked on silently, and the silence set him thinking. He felt that the girl at his side would like to say, only that she was too courteous to say it, that it would be nice if he gave up that occasional glass. Lovers make unselfish decisions a little more easily, perhaps, before marriage than after. Leeson had the gift of thinking rapidly, and his study of heredity and family characteristics told him that what was possible in the history of one sister was not impossible in the life of the other. Lena's devotion to the temperance cause would save her from the evil, and it was his business to help her to maintain that devotion. He could do that by doing as she did.

So before the silence became oppressive he said gently to her—

'Tell me, dearie, are you not wishing that I would take the pledge?'

She clasped his arm with both hands, and with a voice touched with emotion, replied—

'Would you, Fred? It would make me very happy. You could help us all so much, and the sacrifice would be more than met by the joy that would come into your life.'

'Oh, I will not think it a sacrifice, Lena; but that we may have one more bond of union I will join your society. I have read a good deal on the subject, and I will look afresh into Dr. Norman Kerr's work on "Inebriety," and see if we can find any suggestions that will help us in dealing with Millicent.'

They had reached St. James's Hall by this time, but the music of the concert was all the sweeter because of the new joy which had come into Lena's soul.

How different the upward path of self-denial and service Lena was treading from the downward course pursued by her sister; a course which blighted the happiness of herself, her husband, and their innocent child.

What a blessing it would be if the many young women in various grades of society, who have been won over to the temperance cause, would stand firm, and in the days of courtship secure the adhesion of lovers to entire abstinence from the drink, which brings so many evils in its train.