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Ben Latour.

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Some years since I listened to a lecture upon the Evils of Intemperance, and from it gathered the substance of the following tale:—

CHAPTER I.

Ben Latour was a low-browed, big-fisted, miserable, drinking wretch, and—he was my father,

I remember myself as a slight, fair-haired, blue-eyed, trembling little boy, watching him from divers hiding-places, as he raved and stormed at a thin, pale-faced, patient, weeping creature, whom I called "mother."

Heavens! what a tiny fellow I was of my age, and it seemed as though I never should get any bigger. Every week I measured myself with an old yard stick I kept hid away for that purpose; and every week wept, yearned, prayed for manhood! What for? Why, to be able to thrash my father. I hated him! I gazed at his brawny fists of iron—his burly, muscular form—at my mother's wasted features—and down upon my own little limbs, and despaired of becoming a match for him before she died. She was pure, soft, gentle; and oh! how affectionate. I have seen her lay her thin cheek against his rough, bloated face, and be so grateful, if he would permit it to remain for a few moments.

I have seen her place her worn hands upon his swarthy forehead, and drop tears upon his course, matted hair. Tears that he was unworthy of, as the devil is of Heaven.

I have seen him receive the most touching marks of love and affection from her, without the slightest recognition or acknowledgment of them. I wish I could learn women something! I wish it were possible to make them understand that there are men upon whom love, sympathy, patience, gentleness, forbearance, is utterly thrown away—lost!

I was young, but I could see that my mother was servile, humble; crouching like a dog, if her husband would but bestow upon her, in his intervals of sobriety—and they were rare—the most trifling token of his kindness. My blood boils when I think of it.

As soon as I was tall enough to be seen over a counter, I was apprenticed to a grocer in the village. He was a mean, dirty, rumselling grocer, and was glad to give my father rum for my services!

When I could earn an extra four-pence to take home to my poor mother, I was happier than a king. O! the long nights that I spent puzzling my young brain as to the ways and means of earning a little money. Boy as I was, I understood that my grief-worn mother would soon be in a state of actual want. She was on the eve of her second confinement, and O! what a prospect for her—for all of us, indeed! Well, we got through with

it, and there was one more child—a dear little girl—ushered into this sorrowful world.

How I loved that baby! Bitter winds raged without and within the winter she was born; but she was a hardy blossom, and flourished like a flower in the wilderness.—My mother's brow was always overshadowed with her dreadful griefs and constant cares.—My father grew more and more morose as our difficulties increased, and only this little sister could at all brighten or cheer my gloomy life. When I returned from my labors, there she would be in her rough cradle, laughing and clapping her tiny fat hands in paroxysms of delight at nothing—a perfect beam of sunshine amid darkness and desolation.

I worked like a dog to obtain a rattle and a string of beads for her to play with. At last I got them, and a proud boy I was when I presented them before her astonished baby eyes, and saw her reach forth her little damp fists, and curl her mites of fingers among the beads, shaking them hilariously in the glancing sun-light.

She was in the full enjoyment of them, when my father came home drunk! Oh you must nudge me, nor tell me to say "intoxicated." I tell you he was drunk! drunk!

He came reeling into the house, his rolling, blood-shot eyes shooting forth the malice of hell! I saw him look at the baby, at the rattle, at the beads, and at me.

I knew what he suspected, and shouted out in terror, that I had "purchased the toys with money a neighbor had given me for running on errands."

I might as well have explained to the winds. He struck at me fiercely, madly; and my poor mother, who was occupied with her ironing in one corner of the room, came forward, iron in hand, to save me, if possible.—Would to God she had remained at her post for the very devil of rum possessed him. He thrust her rudely backward with the whole force of his giant frame, and she fell! As she fell, the iron flew from her hand—and—in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye, my little joyous sister was sleeping along the shadowy passage that leads to the unknown world!

CHAPTER II.

When I awoke to consciousness, I was lying on the trundle-bed in the furthest corner of our only room.

There was a mountainous weight upon my breast, and a dim darkness, that was not right, rested upon all objects around me. I could not tell if I had been asleep a week, an hour, or a day; but I could hear our old clock ticking away to the same dull, monotonous tune, and could make out that there was a white bundle on the table, and that my father and mother were sitting by the fireside. I saw that his large, brown, brutal-looking hand rested on the back of her chair, and that a more deadly paleness had gathered to her face, and a sharper