

Tales and Sketches.

A DESOLATE HOME.

After some co workers and I had labored for a year or two in a district of poor people in G—, the church to which we belonged resolved to appoint a missionary to work it thoroughly, and they were so kind as to offer the first appointment to me.

In one of the back courts of the district stood a dilapidated block of houses, which, somehow or other, neither my fellow workers nor I had visited. I resolved to make my first visit as missionary there. It was the month of November, and one of its gloomiest days. I ascended the stairs to the topmost flat, and knocked at the door of what is there termed a "single house," or house of one apartment. A faint voice from within bade me "open and come in."

The door opened into a wretched chamber without furniture of any sort beyond a few chairs. On one of these chairs sat an old woman, whose hair was passing from black to grey, and whose skin was brown and wrinkled. She was leaning forward on a long staff, which she grasped by the middle, and looked fixedly in the direction of the door at which I was entering. There was something about the stare of her eyes which I did not like. At first I thought their expression rude and insolent, but I soon perceived that it was the expression of disease, and that she was stone-blind.

"Who are you?" she asked sharply, when I had shut the door.

I told my name and the object of my visit. She turned slowly round and bent forward, as if to look for a particular object. Then she pointed to a corner of the apartment and said: "There be a seat in the corner, bring it here, and sit down and talk to me for I am blind." When I had taken a seat she instantly began to speak herself. She lifted her sightless eyeballs and fixed them on me until I thought she was seeing into my very soul. There was a melancholy bitterness in the tone of her voice which I cannot describe. But the words she uttered, as nearly as I can remember, were as follows:

"Ye're a missionary, are ye? An' ye've come to preach? Well, sir, if ye will tak'an advice from me, I will tell ye what to preach: Preach doun drink, sir. Drink killed my Billie, killed his chum, is killing hundreds, hundreds this very moment. An' it goes on killing long after it has been drunk, and when they that drank it are in their graves.

"Whv, sir, it's truth I'm telling you. My poor, lost, dead Billie's drink, that he drank years ago, is doing its evil work still. It's killing Bessie an' her bairn an' me. Preach doun the drink, man, an' auld mither's like me will lift up their hands an' bless ye.

"We had a happy house afore the drink took Billie. There was Billie an' me, an' Bessie an' her man, an' their bairn. But Billie got among a drinkin' bot at the foundry, an' there was nae mair peace for us. Often he came home in a state he should na ha' been in. And our house went a' wrang, a' wrang. The joy went out, and desolation cam' in its place."

"Yes, sir," the old woman continued. "Yes, sir, it is even sae. I'm blind. I've been blind seven years come Martinmas. My sight grew dim and dimmer for weeks, till at last I could nae see my laddie."

"Ay, sir, my laddie, my brave, well faured, kind hearted laddie kind till the drink took him—he died just a week after I lost my sight. Do you recollect, sir?" She raised her voice and began to speak rapidly. "Ye canna remember: it was seven years last Martinmas." Pausing as if to test her memory, she leaned her head upon the hand which grasped the staff and left me in a painful silence for some moments. I had no power to speak. The mystery of her grief froze me into silence.

At length without lifting her head she murmured to herself:

"Last Martinmas? No, this Martinmas!" Her voice rose suddenly into something like a scream, as her head was lifted up, and her eyeballs fixed upon me with a fearful glare. "This very month, this very day, good sir: seven years, seven years, seven dark, wretched years, this very day, since my lad had to die. One, two, three—yes, on to the seven—seven o' them—an' every year o' them has left its mark in my heart. Another will be made to-day. Listen! that's twelve striking. At twelve o'clock, seven years ago, my Billie was dead, an' his poor auld blind mither couldna get in to kiss his cauld lips. Eh, man, it's sair it's sair even to think o'; but it canna last much longer, and—" What she said more I could not catch, for her voice again sank into its low, murmuring tone, and then into silence for a time.

"I know what ye're waitin' to ask, sir," she said by and by, "an' why should I wish to hide it noo? It wadna hide at the time. But I say noo, as I said then, when it was sounded from every house top, 'It was na my laddie who did it, but the drink, the drink, the cursed drink.' My Billie never meant to kill Tom Molder. They were chums, Billie and he.

"Billie wadna kill, not the youngest day he was, a sly. The foreman o' the works said to the judge, 'Billie was the kindest lad in the shop. When anybody was hurt Billie was sent for.' An' Tom's ain mither stood up in the court an' said that once when Tom was sick Billie came an' carried up water for her and went his messages in his over hours, just as Tom

did, till Tom got well. No, sir, it was na Billie. It was the drink, the drink, the cursed drink that killed Tom Molder. It was the pay night, and there were six o' them. They had been drinking for hours. They began to argue, an' then to quarrel. An' blows were given an' knives were used. My Billie got blows; his face was all cut. An' he, or somebody else, God only know, stabbed Tom Molder, an' Tom fell back an' never spoke more. The four said it was Billie; the judge said it was Billie's knife, an' the jury brought in Billie guilty.

"I prayed in the madness that cam' over me then, that I might never see the licht o' that day when Billie was to die. An' oh, sir, when that day came near it was as if my prayer was bein' granted. I would have given my auld life ten times over to have got one look at my laddie that last visit I paid him. I cried to God for a single blink, for one short blink; but I wadna heard. It was a dark, dark day to me. Out and in, all was darkness—black, horrible darkness. Ye air good to listen to me, sir, sae long. Few will listen to me noo, few will stay beside me. People are afraid of the blind auld woman. Ay, ay; but if they had sorrowed with my sorrow, or felt my fear, may be it might hae been different. I was with Billie that last time an hour an' mair. I thoct if I had na't been blind I might hae seen some de or by which he could hae escaped, or I might hae seen some great one an' pleid for his life. I thoct many foolish thochts. I canna remember them all. I remember best the laddie's heavy sohs. I remember his sad moaning for Tom Molder, an' for Tom's mither, an' for Bessie an' me. An' then he whispered, 'Isn't good father's not here?' Then the turakey cam' an' said it was time for me to go. Poor Billie; he pressed my hands between his cold palms till I was taken away."

"When Billie's day cam', on that very day cam' Bessie's sorrow too. Dan said to her in the gloamin'—Dan? that's her man—'Bess, we're not going to stay here after this.' 'But, Dan, can I leave my blind mother behind? I canna do that.' At that he went out and drew the door after him, an' Bessie has never heard o' him since. It just felled the poor thing, an' she's wastin' awa'. Whaur is she now? is that what ye're askin'? She's out charing: She goes out every day. It's a hard life. An' a bare, cauld house she comes home to at night. My poor, innocent Bessie! But it'll no be for lang. Eh, sir, it's a big mystery to me. What did Bessie do that she should suffer a' this! Oh, sir, preach doun drink and the drinkin' o' drink, and lay the curse o' the Almighty upon baith.

I made arrangements to get Bessie's child sent to school. But when I returned in a few days to tell the grandmother, I found the house filled with other tenants, and no could tell me where she had gone. I never saw her again.

It was a long time before the pain of the story dulled out of my mind. For months after, as often as I went into that particular court, and sometimes when I was far away from it, the image of the blind woman haunted me, and I seemed to hear her weird words piercing into my soul: "Preach doun drink and the drinkin' o' the drink. It killed my Billie. It killed his chum. An' oh, sir, my dead Billie's drinkin' is killin' Bessie an' her bairn, an' me!"—*Morning and Day of Reform.*

HER FIRST MIS-STEP.

A lady of appearances and costly garments indicate social position— attracted attention on Fifth avenue, New York, Monday night, by staggering along with a baby in her arms. When at last she fell to the sidewalk a woman rescued the infant and sent for a policeman. The unconscious mother was locked up in the Fifth street station house. The child, a beautiful one, jumped and crowed when placed on the sergeant's desk, and seemed equally pleased when an agent of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children arrived to take care of him.

The mother, looking pale and sorrowful, was next day brought up in the Essex Market court. Baby was also there, playing with a big policeman's whiskers. The prisoner, in a low voice, gave her name, age (she is about twenty-two years) and residence to the justice.

A well-dressed young man whispered to Justice White, "She is my wife; it is her first mis step; it will never happen again, Judge."

"You seem to be very respectable people," said the court, after the story had been told, "how did it happen this time?"

Hesitatingly, and with great embarrassment, the lady replied: "I hardly know how it happened. I never drank a drop before in my life. I went to pay a visit to a friend in Jersey City on Monday, and she made me drink two glasses of wine. I came over the ferry all right, but when I got out of the cross town car my head went around, and—but, thank God, baby is safe."

Tears began to choke the fair prisoner's utterance. Her husband's arms slipped lightly around her, and he said:

"Can she go, Judge?"

"Yes," answered the court. "She has been terribly punished. I feel very sorry for both of you."

Then the couple stepped down, baby was once more placed in its mother's arms, and was almost smothered by her tears and caresses.—*New York Herald.*