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Custom's Iron Cage.

'I can't get out, I can't get out.'

[The following admirable paper on the power of appetite, which we copy from the *Scottish Temperance Review*, we earnestly commend to all our readers.—Ed. C. T. A.]

Yorick, in the 'Sentimental Journey,' tried to reason himself into the belief, that the Bastille, after all, is not a very hopeful instrument of human improvement, was at least as innocuous as many other modes of human restraint. He compared it to gout, or other forms of disease to which men are periodically subjected, and under whose restraint they bear confinement without any of the terrific associations which the name of the Bastille uniformly stirs. Change the name, therefore, said he, and the terror is instantly gone. Call it lumbago, sciatica, or other foot-restraining disease, and the horrible associations of a mere name immediately disappear. But as soon as there fell on his ear the voice of the captive starting, uttering its lamentation, 'I can't get out, I can't get out,' and as soon as he had done his best, in vain, to restore the captive to liberty, changed in a moment were all his fancies and whims, and the terrible reality of a never ending dungeon thralldom burst upon his mind.

Amid the millions of captives that fluted before his imagination, and out of whom he has painted one with dexterous felicity, there was a form of captivity which he either would not know, or heedlessly contemned. He has shown the captive in his cell with his glimmering light, his wretched pallet, the hopeless walls, the soul-harrowing creak as the grated enclosure shuts for ever; he has shown him notch the stick that circles the days of his living sepulchre; and he has held him up with the very iron of slavery entering his soul. And all this he has done till the blood curdles with sympathy amid the horrors of the dungeon, or rises with the fervour of heaven to curse every tyrant, great or little, that has ever lived. But the captivity that springs out of man's voluntary choice—as, for instance, the slavery of drunkenness, whose captives, in thousands and tens of thousands of instances, may well exclaim, in the language of the starting, 'We can't get out, we can't get out,'—he did not deem it his duty or his interest to portray. The omission may have had reasons, or it may have had none. But the calamitous captivity at this hour is no less real, and no less afflictive, and in multitudes of instances doying all human aid to rescue from the voluntarily-formed enclosure of Custom's Iron Cage.

A distinguished writer of this age has mentioned a curious, and at the same time melancholy and distressing instance of the power of habit in thoroughly enslaving the mind. An individual, addicted to a special vice, had used every form of resolution, and resorted to every expedient he could think of, in order to break, if possible, the spell of its dominion over him, but in vain. After a season the old indulgence was sought, and the old gratification rioted in. At last, with a view to strengthen principle, invigorate conscience, and if possible weaken and ultimately destroy the power of habit, he resolved to write a book against the special vice by which he had so long been enslaved. He set about the accomplishment of his self-imposed task, and actually composed a treatise in exposure and condemnation of his own special vicious indulgence; but without effect. The evil twist remained. The mental and physical bent towards the condemned gratification prevailed. He arose and did as he had ever done. He cast his resolves, his arguments, his sensations, and his mental labor at once and for ever to the winds—a practical repetition of the words of the captive starting, 'I can't get out, I can't get out.'

To those who have watched the condition of the intemperate—to be found too abundantly in every neighborhood—instances will

not be difficult to recall of men and women thoroughly enslaved by this vice. And out of these, perhaps, here and there, an individual could be pointed to that had, during the progress of life, apparently made the most resolute endeavors to be free; to snap asunder the wretched chain that seemed to bind him to evil, and to walk in the liberty of an intelligent and moral being—when, as if by a fascination which no earthly power could elude, an invisible bond that no human agency could break, the vice-controlled simpleton has arisen, and moved like an ox to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks. He has appeared for a season as if he had fairly vanquished the enemy; as if he had said to the tempter, 'Get thee behind me,' as if he had wiped the last taint of vicious desire for ever from his being; and as if now he were of a different stature, texture, mould, and mindedness from the dotard drunkard he has left behind. He is pleased with his liberty; he is almost proud of his new attainment; he is ready to wonder that ever he wore the yoke of such a degrading thralldom. Nay, those who take an interest in the progress of moral reform, who watch the ameliorations which spring up coincident with the downfall of the vice of drunkenness, and who rejoice that another inebriate has gone free, are ready to join in jubilant congratulation, that the victory has been achieved. But after a season the dream is dissipated—the vision utterly dispelled. He appears still on the hook of the old angler, who bids his time in order to make him feel that his freedom was all a dream. He is taken in an evil hour, and perishes in the snare of his own contrivance.

The case of the pauper tippler, as related by an American physician, most affectingly illustrates the tyrant thralldom induced by habitual indulgence. A few years ago, a tippler was put into the almshouse, in a populous town in Massachusetts. Within a few days he had devised various expedients to procure rum, but failed. At length he hit upon one that proved successful. He went into the wood yard of the establishment, placed one hand upon a block, and with an axe in the other, struck it off at a single blow. With the stump raised and streaming he ran into the house, crying, "Get some rum, get some rum! My hand is off!" In the confusion and bustle of the occasion, a bowl of rum was brought, into which he plunged the bleeding member of his body, then raising the bowl to his mouth, drank freely, and exultingly exclaimed, "Now I am satisfied."

What a fearful illustration of the perpetuity of the bondage sometimes found in Custom's iron cage! The craving awakened was even more force than that of the hungry mother who, amid the fell madness of famine, could satiate her appetite on the limbs of her own offspring. The demon-like desire for the habitual stimulant could turn round and devour the members of his own body—could 'eat his flesh like fire.' Truly might he exclaim, 'I can't get out, I can't get out!' when he could attest with such savage ferocity the drinker's engrained nature. It was only equalled, perhaps, by the cool and deliberate declaration of the young man, one of great promise, whom it was attempted to dissuade from habits of intemperance. 'Hear me first a few words,' said he, and then you may proceed. I am sensible that an indulgence in this habit will lead to loss of property, the loss of reputation, the loss of domestic happiness, to premature death, and to the irretrievable loss of my immortal soul; and now, with all this conviction resting firmly on my mind, and flashing over my conscience like lightning, if I still continue to drink—do you think anything you can say will deter me from the practice?' No wonder Dr. Ruah expressed his view of the tenacity and perpetuity of the habitual appetite of the drunkard, when he said, 'If a man was sent to hell, and kept there for a thousand years as a punishment for drinking, and then returned, his first cry would be, "Give me rum, give me rum!"' Men will venture, not only in full view of the physical consequences that result from vicious indulgence, but seeing in the issue the catastrophe of mental, moral, spiritual perdition—they will venture onward, seeking the momentary gratification within the very jaws of temporal and everlasting ruin. Is it not an iron cage? And is its most piteous and doleful utterance not rightly given, 'I can't get out, I can't get out?'

It is not meant that every drunkard is ir reclaimable, or that once on the declivity of intemperance, return to sobriety, and the abrogation of the drinking usages, is next to impossible. Many who had been confirmed sots, and many more who had been on the highway to the thralldom of sottiness, have retraced their steps, and stood forth in the liberty of perfect freedom from the dominion