

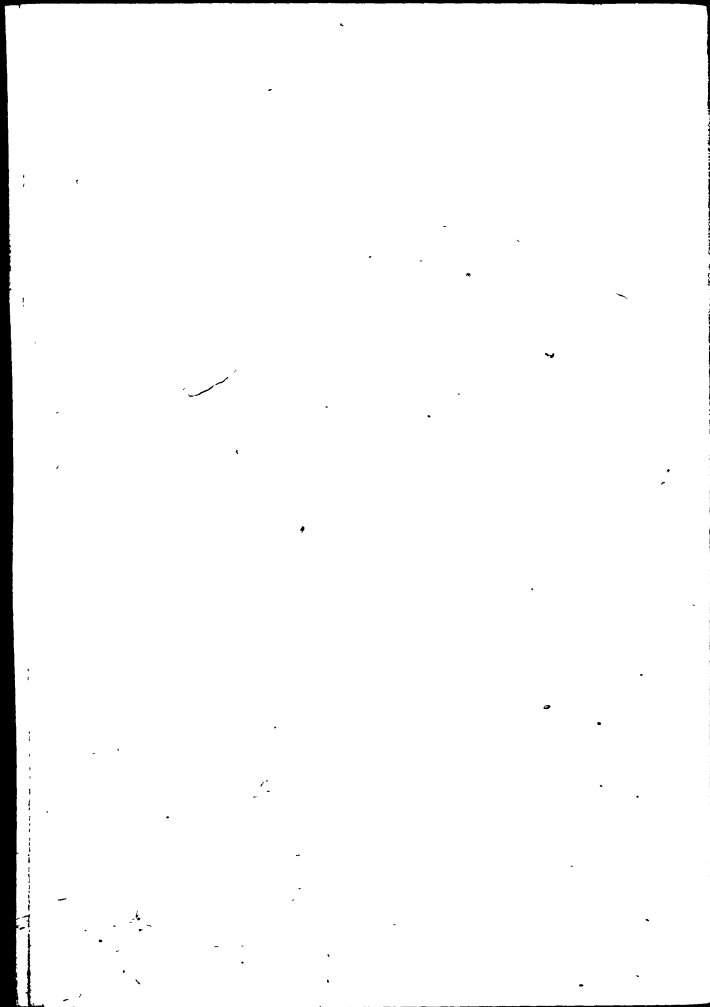


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STEP BY STEP:

OR, THE

SHADOW ON A CANADIAN HOME.



*Poetry*

1400

# STEP BY STEP;

OR, THE

## SHADOW ON A CANADIAN HOME,

BY

M. E. MUCHALL,

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A STORY IN TWO PARTS:

PART I.—“THE BEGINNING.”

PART II.—“AND THE END.”

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TORONTO :  
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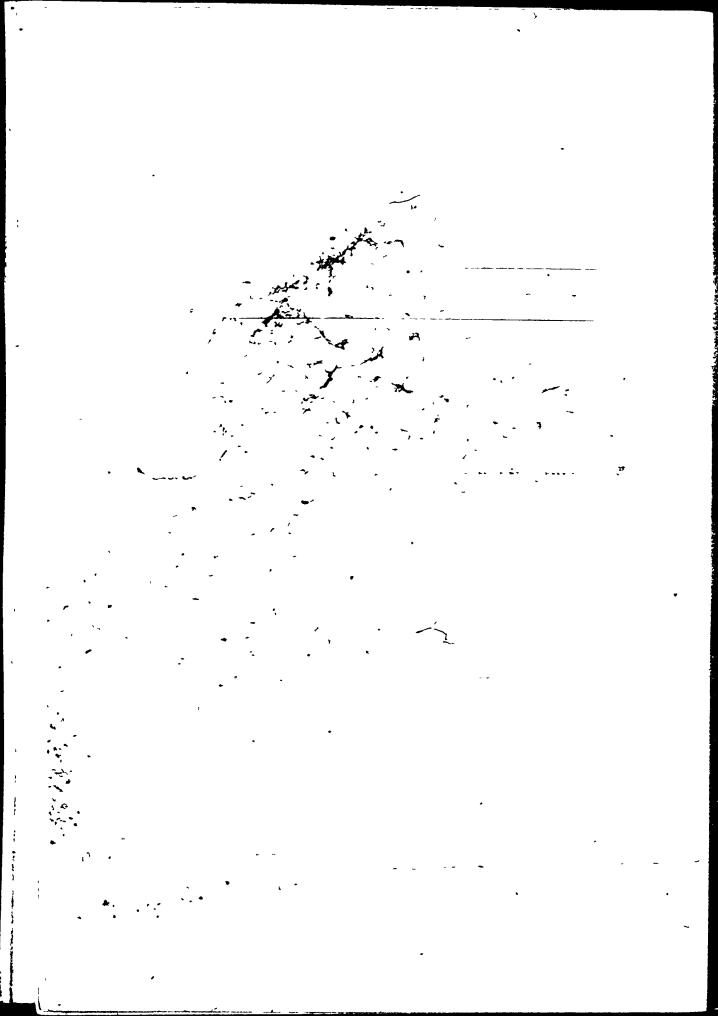
## DEDICATION.

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This little book is dedicated to my dearest mother ; knowing, as I do, that whatever strangers may say concerning it, she, at least, will pass over its many imperfections leniently, and linger kindly over its merits, if, indeed, it possesses any ; remembering only that it was written under many difficulties by her own living child.

M. E. MUCHALL.

LAKEFIELD, ONT.



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## INTRODUCTION:

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The village of M—— lay nestled among  
High hills and maple trees  
That bent in the winter's stormy gale,  
Or stirred in the summer breeze:

There were noisy mills on the rapid stream  
That gleamed in the soft moonlight,  
Or sparkled and flashed in the sun's warm smiles  
Like diamonds so rare and bright.

And busy men, in those whirling mills,  
Worked hard, both night and day,  
They toil'd for the loved and treasured homes  
That down in the valley lay.

The village appeared so pretty and neat,  
So pure and fresh was the air ;  
You scarce could believe that sorrow or strife  
Could ever find entrance there.

Though bright and fair looked those village homes  
With their maple trees sturdy and tall,  
John Lane's, with its pretty gabled roof,  
Looked neatest and best of all.

We'll just peep in, ere the blinds are drawn,  
And what is the picture there ?  
A young wife smiling, with glad blue eyes,  
With a face both winsome and fair.

Her husband comes in, and she welcomes him  
With the love of a fond young wife ;  
Oh, surely, a shadow can never fall  
To darken their home and their married life !

Yes, one is there, but she sees it not,  
 So blind in her love for him ;  
 No fault, no weakness in him she sees :  
 So the shadow, just now, is but faint and dim.

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Another peep into John Lane's home,  
 Though scarcely three years are past ;  
 Is his wife as fair, and as free from care,  
 As she was when we saw her last ?

Oh, no ! there's an anxious, fretted look,  
 To be seen in her sweet blue eye ;  
 And, as we draw near, we start to hear  
 The sound of a smothered sigh.

But the room looks just as it did before,  
 The lamp and the fire burn bright ;  
 Then, what is the trouble that makes her sigh ?  
 Her husband is absent to-night !

Away from home, and 'tis growing late,  
He's gone away to the "Beacon Light;"  
And knowing he goes too often there,  
Sadly troubles poor May to-night.

The shadow ! the shadow ! she sees it now ;  
Already it darkens her married life ;  
But bravely she's seeking to bear it well,  
With all the love of a good true wife.

You ask, what shadow looms o'er her home ?  
Turn back, and listen with me  
To her earnest pleading with him to-night,  
As soon as they rose from their early tea.

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PART I.

“THE BEGINNING.”

“Dear John,” she said, “You’ll not go out,  
And leave me here alone.”

The snow is falling thick and fast,  
The wind begins to moan.

“I’ve made the fire burn up so bright,  
The room is neat and warm ;  
Oh, what can tempt you out again  
In the cold wind and storm ?

“Surely your love for me ’s grown cold !  
Surely your home ’s grown drear !  
Because you seldom stay at home,  
But leave me lonely here.

“ When first I married you, dear John,  
You promised not to roam ;  
But spend your evenings here with me  
In our sweet quiet home.”

John heeded not his young wife's words ;  
He heeded not her smile ;  
For power, more strong than love for her,  
Was tempting him the while.

The spirit-fiend it was that spoke,  
And stifled all his fears :  
“ Don't stay to think, but come and drink,  
Don't heed a woman's tears !”

Yet on her bowed and tear-stained face,  
One kindly glance he cast,  
And said, “ I promise faithfully  
This night 's the very last

“That I shall ever stay from home ;  
I'll keep my promise true ;  
And I'll return in half an hour,  
So cheer up, darling, do.”

He shut the door, and soon his step  
Grew fainter on her ear,  
As down the street, so rapidly,  
He, to a tavern near,

Entered ; and there he met old friends  
Who urged him on to stay ;  
In drink, and coarse and foolish jests,  
The time fast passed away.

He never really meant to stay  
Beyond the promised time,  
And started, in dismay, to hear  
Twelve, from the town clock, chime.

He rose at once, he would not stay  
One single moment more ;  
And much ashamed, indeed he was,  
He had not gone before.

“ I'll not go out again,” he thought,  
As he walked slowly home ;  
“ It is not right, I know, to leave  
Poor May so much alone !”

He raised the latch, and stepped within,  
His wife was sitting there,  
Just where we saw her—now asleep  
Within the old arm-chair.

When first he left, though sad enough,  
She still kept thinking o'er  
The words he said before he left :  
“ I will go out no more.”



But then, for many and many a night,  
He's promised me the same ;  
I half begin to wonder now  
If I can be to blame ?

“ He hinted so, the other night ;  
The fault must lie with me ;  
Perhaps I am not half so bright  
As once I used to be.

“ But still it seems so hard to smile,  
When John is seldom here ;  
To talk and read as once he did,  
“ And all my work to cheer.

And often now, instead of smiles,  
He greets me with a frown ;  
And as he hates to see me cry,  
I keep the sad tears down !

“ Down, till I’m sure he’s gone away  
Off to the ‘ Beacon Light ;’  
And then they fall unchecked by me,  
Just as they do to-night.

“ I could not bear, I’m sure to think,  
I’d driven him to roam ;  
To seek for pleasure anywhere,  
Except with me at home.

“ I think he must be coming soon :  
I’ll just step out and see ;  
The half hour’s up ; I feel so sure  
He will not later be.”

She’s peering now, with eager eyes,  
Outside the cottage door ;  
She only sees the falling snow,  
And hears the wild wind roar.

Look out no more, poor trusting heart,  
He will not come this hour ;  
For even while you watch for him,  
The spirit fiend hath power.

Power to drown every thought of home,  
Strong power to make him stay ;  
And, in the paths of wilful sin,  
To linger and delay.

O men ! if you would only think,  
When tempted thus to roam,  
How wearily the long hours pass  
To anxious ones at home !

You toil all day, but then at night  
There comes some rest for you ;  
While wives and mothers always find  
Work for their hands to do.

And when a weary wife sits down  
To mend or knit at night,  
It is the husband's voice and smile  
That makes her labour light.

A wife is writing thus to you,  
She knows no sound so dear  
As of her husband's welcome step  
When evening tide draws near.

But when delayed, a thousand fears  
Oppress the anxious heart,  
For husband, home, and happiness,  
Can never dwell apart.

Trials of poverty and want  
Are hard indeed to bear,  
But seem to lose just half their weight  
When each one takes their share.

Then do not leave it all to them ;  
You know they have enough ;  
You promised, in your marriage vows,  
To share the smooth and rough.

I know 'tis hard when troubles come  
And linger round your door,  
To fight against them manfully—  
I'm writing to the poor.

Because I know they often seek  
To drown their cares in drink ;  
But though 'tis comfort at the time,  
It leads them to the brink

Of that dread pit prepared for those  
Who never can be blessed,  
Where the wicked never cease to moan,  
The weary never rest.

Mary was sleeping heavily,  
When John stole to her side,  
All trace of grief and anxious care  
From her sweet face had died.

She wakened with a sudden start,  
And found him standing near ;  
She smiled at once to welcome him,  
Saying, " Why, John, my dear,

" I was so dull, I fell asleep  
About an hour ago ;  
Have you been long here watching me ?"  
He did not answer " No ;"

But led her rather to suppose  
He'd been some time within ;  
So now concealment adds a link  
To his long chain of sin.

He could not go to work next day ;  
Untasted were his meals ;  
For when a man drinks late at night,  
Too wretched far he feels

To care for any food to eat,  
Or raise the aching head,  
Which feels as if 'twas tightly pressed  
With heavy balls of lead.

Thus past the day, then came the night ;  
The spirit fiend again  
Tempted him with the promise fair  
That drink would ease his pain.

Yes, it had come to this at last,  
That like a shadow dim,  
The desperate craze for stimulants  
Came creeping over him.

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It was a habit formed in youth,  
Though for a time it lay  
Dormant—a stronger passion reigned :  
Love, for a time, held sway.

A stranger in M——, he won her love :  
Poor girl, she never knew,  
And she was full two years his wife,  
Ere she believed it true !

For when he first began to tire  
Of home, she little thought  
That he, for drink and company,  
A tavern bar-room sought.

He never was unkind to her :  
He only went from home,  
Till she, at last, was often left,  
Night after night, alone !



So time went on ; and she, poor soul,  
Hoped that when baby came,  
John would give up his rambling ways,  
And once more be the same.

The same as when he married her,  
And brought her there a bride,  
Into his home, and seemed so glad  
To linger by her side.

But, as he lay all that long day,  
Her heart felt sad and sore ;  
Bad he had been, she'd never seen  
Him stay from work before.

I said, that when the night came on  
The spirit fiend again  
Assailed him with fair promises,  
That drink would ease his pain.

Still he had said, he'd not go out :  
Promised his weeping May ;  
And, for a time, he bravely fought  
To keep the fiend at bay.

His master kindly spoke to him  
After his work next night,  
As for some time he'd noticed him,  
And saw all was not right.

“ Why, John, my man,” he kindly said,  
“ I'd like so much to know  
What's made so great a change in you,  
From one short year ago ?

“ You seldom come to work till late,  
Looking but half awake ;  
I've lately thought so—is it true,  
That you too much may take ?

Remember, John, your sweet young wife

Shortly will be confined ;

And is it likely she'll do well

With this grief on her mind ?

And she will want some comforts then,

That you can well provide ;

For, out of your large wages, John,

Some should be laid aside.

Aside to meet a rainy day :

Such days you yet may see ;

And then, if you have something saved,

How thankful you will be.

So now, my man, just promise me ;

Nor let your words prove vain :

That if I keep you in my mill,

You will not drink again."

John was quite touched at what he said,  
And a fair promise made,  
Of wages he would lay aside,  
When each week's work was paid.

And for a little time he tried  
To give the habit o'er ;  
At least, I think that he did not drink  
Half so hard as he did before.

Then baby came, and it brought some change,  
For John was so proud of his fine young son,  
That seldom he ever went out at night,  
But staid at home when his work was done.

And May grew happy and bright once more,  
As she marked the change that came over him  
Her love and respect returned again—  
Once more the shadow grew faint and dim.

John worked for the same old master still,  
Who kept him on when he steadier grew ;  
But times for the lumberers were very hard—  
The mills had little for them to do.

But still he was keeping his old hands on,  
Though low were the wages he gave each man.  
It is better than nothing," he said to them ;  
"I'll raise them higher, whenever I can."

May found it hard to keep out of debt,  
For John, though he never went out at night,  
I grieve to say that he went each day  
For something to drink at the "Beacon Light."

Of course, it was only five cents a glass ;  
But that, when repeated three times each day,  
Made quite a sum upon Saturday night,  
Which out of his wages he had to pay.

So, whether his wages were large or small,  
He managed to pay up the old week's score,  
Because if he did not, he knew full well,  
Until it was cancelled, he'd get no more.

May sometimes thought that he used it still,  
And felt afraid, like an anxious wife,  
Should troubles arise and trials come,  
He might go back to the same old life.

She, too, was proud of her little son,  
A "fair" little creature, so good and wise ;  
Better than most of the children round,  
Of course, he appeared in his mother's eyes.

Till Harry was just about nine months old,  
The days passed on, and no great change brought  
Then John began to grow tired of home,  
And once more the bar-room he nightly sought.

One Saturday night, as they sat at tea,  
He said to May, with a careless laugh,  
I've little to give you to spend this week,  
For I paid a bill, and it took just half."

O, John," wailed Mary, "how can you spend  
Your money in drink, when we want it so?  
There is wood to buy, and there 's debts to pay ;  
The grocer and butcher won't wait, you know.

And Harry is wanting a winter cap ;  
I hoped this week to have bought him one ;  
And, as for my shoes, they are all in holes,  
My feet get wet when I put them on.

Besides, if the mills should happen to close,  
It would not be easy fresh work to get ;  
And now that the winter will soon be on,  
We have nothing laid by for that season yet.

“O, don’t go again to the ‘Beacon Light,’  
So late are the hours that they seem to keep ;  
I never can tell when you may be home,  
And I get so anxious, I cannot sleep.”

Not many weeks later, when John came home,  
He pushed the little boy out of his way ;  
Gloomy he sat, with a downcast look,  
Which greatly troubled poor anxious May.

“Is anything wrong,” she gently asked,  
Hushing the frightened boy as she spoke ;  
“Everything wrong—the mill is closed,  
And folks all say that our master’s broke.

“No work whatever for months to come,  
And winter is coming upon us fast ;  
The master behaved like an honest man,  
Paying his hands to the very last.



So, now, we have nothing to live on here,  
P ; And poverty seems such a sore disgrace ;  
I've made up my mind that I will sell out,  
And try my luck in some distant place.

e, The money we'll get for our house and lot,  
Will keep us all right till I look about ;  
Never you fear, but I'll get some work—  
Yes, steady employment, ere it runs out.

In any large city there 's lots to do,  
While something of life one is sure to see ;  
Toronto or London, I don't care which,  
I've made up my mind that a move shall be.

So, May, don't try to dispute my plans,  
Or wring your hands, and begin to cry ;  
In two or three days you will think me wise,  
And long for the change just as much I."

His voice was thick, and his face was flushed ;  
His manner so queer and strange that night —  
May knew he'd been drinking, and hoped to find  
He had changed his plans by the morning light

So quietly hushing her boy to rest,  
No word on the subject that night she said ;  
But, oh ! in the dark and silent hours  
When he was sleeping, hot tears she shed.

The morning dawn'd, but it brought no change  
In the plan that had entered her husband's brain  
Though long and earnestly poor May begged ;  
Her tears, her entreaties, were all in vain.

Poor girl, as she looked round the empty rooms  
Missing the treasures she'd kept for years ;  
No wonder, indeed, that her heart was sore ;  
No wonder her eyes filled so often with tears.

Dearly she loved every bit of ground,  
For had she not come there a happy wife ;  
And she clung to it still, though a shadow dim  
Clouded the light of her married life.

From room to room she wandered about,  
Looking at things that were her's no more ;  
Then for a season bright hope died out,  
Her heart within her was faint and sore.

But, now and again, she was forced to smile  
At baby, he seemed so full of glee,  
Creeping about from place to place,  
Peering at all that was there to see.

For he was as happy as any young king ;  
The bustle of moving amused him much ;  
So he laid his hands upon many a thing  
He knew quite well that he should not touch.

Cups and saucers, and knives and spoons,  
Treasures they seemed to his baby mind ;  
So he carried them off when they lay about,  
And anything else that his hands could find ;

Carrying them off with a shout of joy,  
But, in his eager haste, losing half ;  
Then creeping back to gather them up,  
Treating mamma to a saucy laugh.

Little May dreamt, as she looked at him,  
That want and sickness, and wasting pain,  
Would steal over the life of her darling son,  
Ere she could visit that home again.

They slept at a neighbour's, the last sad night,  
And left for Toronto by early train ;  
The weather was bright when they started off,  
But they entered the city through pouring rain.

For some little time in lodgings they staid,  
But May was quite thankful to get away ;  
For John still drank, and their means were small,  
And heavy the board-bill they had to pay.

So after a good deal of looking about,  
Two poor furnished rooms they managed to get ;  
They gladly secured them, and settled down,  
Though she found the people a roughish set.

No constant employment he met with there,  
For he was a stranger in that large town ;  
So it went on from week to week,  
Till most of his money had dwindled down.

And if, in his early and brighter days,  
He drank so oft of the baneful cup,  
No wonder, it seemed that in such sore straits,  
He drank with the hope it would cheer him up.

Night after night he stayed out for hours,  
Spending the trifle he earned by day ;  
The old worn look to May's face returned,  
As she sighed for the dear home, now far away.

But after a while a look there grew  
On her face, and it's tale was no mystery :  
It plainly spoke of a want of food !  
The saddest of all sad tales to me.

Yes, mother and child, it has come to pass,  
They're pining for proper food to eat ;  
While he, when he earns a shilling, goes  
Into a tavern to drink or treat.

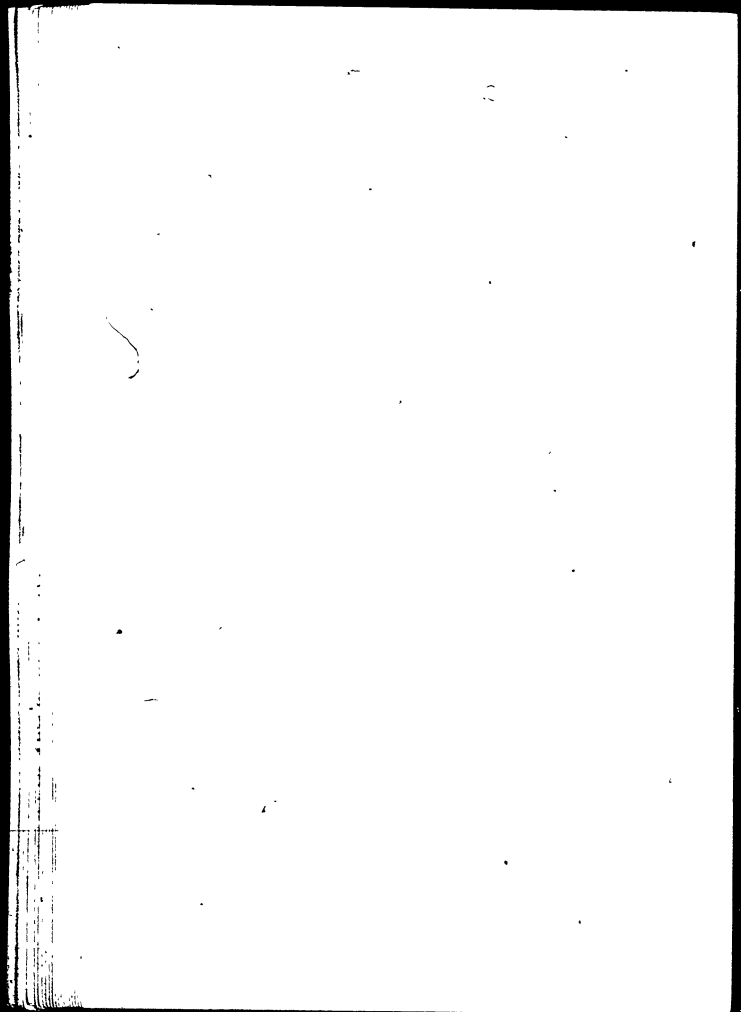
Bartered for drink are his marriage vows,  
The vows that he made on his wedding day ;  
Bartered for drink, is all self respect ;  
For drink, he has bartered them all away.

Methinks it is one of the saddest sights  
Seen in this weary world of sin,  
When, back to the children and anxious wife,  
A man from the tavern comes reeling in.

The desperate despair that comes surging o'er  
The poor wife's heart, like a thick black cloud ;  
While shuddering, the little ones creep away,  
Or cling round their mother, and sob aloud.

He who should guard them from every harm,  
In whose strong love they should all rejoice,  
Causes their hearts to dread and fear  
The upraised hand, and the angry voice.

This is a picture of many a home,  
No high-flown view of the curse I take ;  
The horrors of drink, oh, I would that men  
Now and FOREVER would drink forsake !





PART II.

“AND THE END.”

Only a single crust of bread,  
Harry, my darling, for you and I ;  
Like the widow of old, we'll eat of it,  
And then lie down and die.

Oh Harry, when first you were given to me,  
And I fondly cradled your tiny head,  
How little I thought it would come to pass,  
You ever should want for a piece of bread !

That almost before you could plainly speak,  
“Give me some food,” was your wailing cry !  
And I hushed your cries with a heart that felt  
As if it would burst with its agony.

“No money, no friends ; I’m not fit to work ;  
God pity us both, I say ;  
For I am alone in this weary world,  
Oh, what can I do but pray !

“Yours is the easier lot, my boy ;  
You can but feel want and pain ;  
While I have the memory of better days  
That never can come again.

“Helpless I’m watching you, day after day,  
Fading surely before my sight ;  
And fear, as I kiss you when morning dawns,  
Your lips will be cold ere night.

“Oh, had we been back in the dear old place,  
’Twould seem more easy to lose you there ;  
But in this strange city, uncared for, alone,  
My darling, this trial is hard to bear.

Alone, ah ! I never knew all that meant !  
Never once guessed at its depths of woe ;  
The troubles I've pass'd through, since I came here,  
Only the Lord himself can know.

Only the Lord !” O thou much tried one !  
Why He is the tenderest friend,  
The love and deep pity He feels for you  
Is boundless : it has no end.

Only the Lord !” but the silver and gold,  
Remember, belong to Him ;  
And He, in His own good time, will help ;  
O, let not your faith grow dim.”

Many in trouble have proved this true,  
Aid came from, they knew not where ;  
Then surely they felt it was sent from God  
In answer to earnest prayer.

You say He is taking your child away ;  
But where ? From a world of sin ;  
And Christ, on the cruel cross, was nailed,  
To open the gates of Heaven for him.

Perhaps he is one of the chosen lambs,  
Christ wants so early within the fold,  
From sin's sharp conflict,—safe sheltered there,  
In yonder fair city,—whose streets are gold.

The winter was long and cold that year ;  
She was not able to work one day ;  
For she was not strong, and he grew so ill,  
That all day long in her arms he lay.

They had moved once more to another street,  
They could not manage high rent to pay ;  
The people were strangers, of course, to her ;  
She'd no one to speak to, the livelong day.

One night as he lay there, so white and still,  
She sobbed out the words that I've told to you ;  
The child was dying, she knew too well ;  
His features were growing so pinched and blue.

Oh, you that are blessed, in this changing world,  
With wealth and a boundless store,  
As daily you pass by their wretched homes,  
Do you think of the hungry poor ?

Of the careworn silently suffering ones  
That live by your very side,  
Striving to live on a wretched sum,  
The comforts of life denied.

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They cannot endure that the world should know  
They have not enough to eat !  
But suffer in silence, from day to day ;  
There are some such in every street.

What can they think of the wealthy ones  
Passing them thoughtlessly by each day ?  
No wonder to me that they grow so hard,  
No wonder to me that their strength gives way.

You give to the beggar that seeks your door,  
Yes, do so with liberal hand ;  
But, oh, there are others to pity more,  
The silent poor of our land !

They quietly suffer—they ask no aid—  
It seemed such a sore disgrace  
To ask for help ; so they struggle on ;  
Such people are living in every place.

When your children sit round the family hearth,  
And you smile on each fair young head,  
Just think for a moment how you would feel,  
To hear them crying for bread !

Crying for food, that you could not buy ;  
For comforts, you could not win ;  
Methinks could you fancy this fate for them,  
Your eyes would with tears grow dim.

But let us return to the dying child :  
His warfare will soon be o'er ;  
O, yes ; 'tis a short and sinless one—  
He is nearing the distant shore.

The arms, that all day had clasped her neck,  
Are growing so icy cold ;  
And feebly they fall, for all strength is gone—  
They cannot retain their hold.

And the sweet blue eyes, that so often smiled,  
In spite of the wasting and lingering pain,  
Are glazed and dim, and they never more  
Will smile on his mother on earth again.

One long-drawn sigh from his quivering lips,  
One short, sharp struggle—the spirit fled—  
A wailing cry from the mother came,  
As soon as she saw her boy was dead !

Only one cry from her lips ; no more :  
Then all was as still as death !  
The people across the street turned pale,  
And listened with bated breath.

“ There is something amiss ; ” a woman said  
To two or three neighbours, who'd come for tea  
“ There is something wrong ! did you hear that cry ?  
Will one of you men step over and see ?

“ The people are strangers, they came last month,  
And they must be very poor, I think ;  
The man, I see, is a worthless soul,  
Who spends all the money he gets in drink.



‘The woman I saw, as I passed to-day ;  
They live, you know, in a wretched place ;  
And I am quite sure they are very poor,  
By the anxious look on her thin, pale face.

‘Her eyes, to my mind, had a hungry look ;  
They seem to go to my very heart ;  
Had I only a loaf in the house to-night,  
I could not sleep till she got a part.

‘It seems a shame she ’s been here so long,  
And not one creature has crossed her floor ;  
Should anything happen to her, I think,  
We’d lay the blame at each other’s door.

And though it is little we have ourselves,  
I know that a few of you’ll join with me  
In taking her over a few good things,  
Some bread, some meat, and a little tea.”

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They reached the house : the sight they saw  
They never could forget ;  
And women's sobs came thick and fast,  
While strong men's eyes grew wet.

For, crouching on his knees before  
The body of his child,  
A frantic father there they saw,  
In grief and anguish wild.

He had returned just ere they came,  
And May had raised her head ;  
To say, in tones of wailing grief,  
" Oh, John, our boy is dead !"

His answer was one fearful scream  
Of anguish, deep and wild ;  
Madly he flung himself upon  
The body of his child.

“Don't say those fearful words again,”

He fiercely, wildly said ;

“Surely you're only mocking me :

Dead! oh, he can't be dead!”

God help him ! he has need of help :

He knows not how to pray ;

He moans out vain appeals to men,

Who sigh and turn away.

Now laughing loud in frantic mirth,

Now wailing in despair ;

At last they lift him from the ground,

And carry him from there.

While women crowd around poor May,

Trying to cheer her woe,

They wish to lay the body out :

She will not let him go.

“Leave him,” she said, “a little while,  
And then I’ll let him go :  
It seems so hard to lay him down  
Under the drifting snow.”

“Father, one thing I ask of Thee :  
It is, I soon may rest  
Down in the quiet and silent grave,  
With Harry on my breast.”

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Another day, and one more night,  
In watching, she has pass’d :  
Then came the hardest trial yet,  
When she must gaze her last

On her fair boy, so soon to lie  
Under the frozen sod ;  
But in that time she’d learn’d to bow  
Down to the will of God.

Gone is the fierce rebellious grief,  
Softened the heart's deep pain ;  
My boy," she whispered, " now, I see,  
My loss, your endless gain."

Oh, Lord, forgive the sinful wish,  
Breathed in such black despair ;  
Teach me to wait Thy own good time,  
To die and meet him there."

Yes, Lord," my life is in Thy hand ;  
Then teach me how to wait ;  
But when I die, Oh ! may he stand  
Close to the golden gate.

With outstretched arms to welcome me,  
And clasp my trembling hand,  
That I may surely see his face  
Soon as I reach Thy land."

Fondly she kissed the dear, cold lips,  
But ere love's work was done,  
She lifted up the sunny curls,  
And then she severed one,  
All that on earth she now could hold  
Belonging to her son !

So he was laid that day to rest  
Under the drifting snow,  
Follow'd by strangers to the grave :  
She was not fit to go.

Soon she was called to John's bedside,  
Who, in the horrors tossed,  
Shrieking in anguish, fierce and wild,  
" My soul, my soul is lost !

" I am not fit to leave this world ;  
I cannot meet the eye  
Of the Great Judge of all my sins ;  
I dare not, dare not die !

The spirit fiend is with me now,  
I see him through the gloom ;  
I hear him laugh exultingly  
Over his victim's doom !

I know 'tis the drink that's killing me,  
But I must drink again ;  
For only when I have it not,  
I feel this burning pain !

Drink, give me drink ; quick, quick, I say ;  
Oh, I must have it now !  
May, will you come, and lay your hand  
Over my throbbing brow !

Here comes that awful fiend again ;  
I feel his scorching breath,  
Closer and closer yet he comes,  
To close my eyes in death.

“ For ever now, before my eyes,  
I see my murdered son,  
Taunting me with his cruel death ;  
My hell on earth 's begun !

“ Oh, for one word from my poor wife !  
My sorely injured May !  
I want her close beside me now,  
She'd teach me how to pray.

“ What mockery to speak of prayer ;  
How can there ever be  
One single hope of mercy given  
To guilty ones like me ?

“ What do I hear ? The blood of Christ,  
It cleanseth from all sin ?  
Who tells me this ? The words are sweet ;  
But do they take me in ?”



'Yes, dearest John," 'twas May that spoke ;  
Those words are meant for you ;  
The Lord himself has spoken them ;  
They are, they must be true.

True, for the very guiltiest soul,  
Under the wrath of God,  
Coming to Christ, can have his sins  
Washed in His precious blood.

'John, it was just for sins like yours,  
Jesus bled upon Calvary,  
Bearing the curse, he paid your debt ;  
'Only believe' it, and you are free !'

Sweet seemed these words to his troubled mind,  
Thinking them over, he quietly lay  
Clasping the hand of his faithful wife,  
Whispering to her to kneel down and pray.

“Pray that I may be forgiven,” he said :

“Pray those sweet words may be meant for me ;  
Pray I may learn to believe them true,  
Guilty and sin-stained although I be.”

Long and earnestly did she pray,

Asking her Lord his power to prove ;  
Her prayer was answered : God's Spirit came,  
Opening his eyes to his Saviour's love.

Listen with me to his dying words,

Some weeks after, when called to go :  
“May, dear, I love that hymn so well ;  
'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.’

“Pray for me, darling, I'm dying now ;

Soon will my faint heart cease to beat ;  
But O, I am lying so low, so low ;  
Lying down at the dear Lord's feet.

And though my whole life has been one long sin,

I cannot get lower than there you know,  
Down at the Blessed Saviour's feet,  
Who loves me, and washed me whiter than snow.

Kiss me, my darling ; forgive me all ;

Oh, you have been such a dear good wife,  
Never reproaching me, though I cast  
Shadows so dark o'er your married life !

And May, should our baby so soon to come,

Again prove a son ; bring him up for God,  
Teach him the taste of drink to shun,  
Tell him the sad course his father trod !"

He spoke once again ; but she could not hear,

Save two or three words in a whisper low ;  
But those that fell on her listening ear  
Were, " wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Trusting in Jesus, he calmly died ;  
Soon by the side of his child he slept ;  
While May, with the friends that the Lord raised up  
Till after her baby's birth was kept.

A fine little daughter it proved to be,  
With sweet blue eyes, and complexion fair ;  
Like Harry, they said ; but May saw it not,  
Except in the tint of her golden hair.

When she grew stronger, she moved once more  
To the village of M——, for she loved it so ;  
And all were ready, with greetings warm,  
For the friend who had left them three years ago

And often now, as the years roll on,  
As little May sits on her mother's knee,  
She speaks of the father and brother's graves,  
The graves she will take her some day to see.

My task is ended, my story is done ;  
But think, as you read, of a wasted life,  
The evil of drinking 'tis well to shun ;  
For May's but a picture of many a wife !

To you that are entering the race of life,  
I warn you back from the drunkard's lot ;  
I beg you, with all my heart and soul,  
By every thing sacred, to touch it not.

To you, who are wishing to give it up,  
Knowing it leads your feet astray ;  
Trust not, my friends, to your own small strength,  
Lean on your Saviour, and watch and pray.

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