

"WOMAN, BEHOLD THY SON!"

The golden rays of a summer afternoon were streaming through the windows of a quiet apartment, where every thing was the picture of orderly repose. Gently and noiselessly they glide, gilding the glossy old chairs, polished by years of care; fluttering with flickering gleam on the bookcases, by the fire, and the antique China vases on the mantel, and even coqueting with sparkles of fanciful gayety over the face of the perpendicular, sombre old clock, which, though at times apparently coaxed almost to the verge of a smile, still continued its inevitable tick, as for a century before.

On the hearth rug lay outstretched a great, lazy-looking, Maltese cat, evidently enjoying the golden beam that fell upon his sober sides, and sleepily opening and shutting his great green eyes, as if lost in luxurious contemplation.

But the most characteristic figure in the whole picture was that of an aged woman, who sat quietly rocking to and fro in a great chair by the side of a large round table covered with books. There was a quiet beauty in that placid face--that silvery hair brushed neatly under the snowy border of the cap. Every line in that furrowed face told some tale of sorrow long assuaged, and passions hushed to rest, as on the calm ocean shore the golden-furrowed sand shows traces of storms and fluctuations long past.

On the round, green-covered table beside her lay the quiet companion of her age, the large Bible, whose pages, like the gates of the celestial city, were not shut at all by day, a few old standard books, and the pleasant, rippling knitting, whose dreamy, irresponsible monotony is the best music of age.

A fair, girlish form was seated by the table; the dress bonnet had fallen back on her shoulders, the soft cheeks were suffused and earnest, the long lashes and the veiled eyes were eloquent of subdued feeling, as she read aloud from the letter in her hand. It was from "our Harry," a name to both of them comprising all that was dear and valued on earth, for he was "the only son of his mother, and she a widow;" yet had he not been always an only one; flower after flower on the tree of her life had bloomed and died, and gradually, as waters cut off from many channels, the streams of love had centred deeper in this last and only one.

And, in truth, Harry Sargeant was all that a mother might desire or be proud of. Generous, high-minded, witty, and talented, and with a strong and noble physical development, he seemed born to command the love of women. The only trouble with him was, in common parlance, that he was too clever a fellow; he was too social, too impressible, too versatile, too attractive, and too much in demand for his own good. He always drew company about him, as honey draws flies, and was indispensable every where and to every body; and it needs a steady head and firm nerves for such a one to escape ruin.

Harry's course in college, though brilliant in scholarship, had been critical and perilous. He was a decided favorite with the faculty and students; yet it required a great deal of hard winking and adroit management on the part of his instructors to bring him through without infringement of college laws and proprieties: not that he ever meant the least harm in his life, but that some extra generous impulse, some quixotic generosity, was always tumbling him, neck and heels, into somebody's scrapes, and making him part and parcel in every piece of mischief that was going on.

With all this premised, there is no need to say that Harry was a special favorite with ladies; in truth, it was a confessed fact among his acquaintances, that, whereas dozens of creditable, respectable, well-to-do young men might besiege female hearts with every proper formality, waiting at the gates and watching at the posts of the doors in vain, yet before him all gates and passages seemed to fly open of their own accord. Nevertheless, there was in his native village one quiet maiden who held alone in her hand the key that could unlock his heart in return, and carried silently in her own the spell that could fetter that brilliant, restless spirit; and she it was, of the thoughtful brow and downcast eyes, whom we saw in our picture, bending over the letter with his mother.

That mother Harry loved to idolatry. She was to his mind an impersonation of all that was lovely in womanhood, hallowed and sainted

by age, by wisdom, by sorrow; and his love for her was a beautiful union of protective tenderness, with veneration; and to his Ellen it seemed the best and most sacred evidence of the nobleness of his nature, and of the worth of the heart which he had pledged to her.

Nevertheless, there was a danger overhanging the heads of the three--a little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, rising in the horizon of their hopes, yet destined to burst upon them, dark and dreadful, in a future day.

In those scenes of college hilarity where Harry had been so indispensable, the bright, poetic wine cup had freely circulated, and often amid the flush of conversation, and the genial excitement of the hour, he had drunk freer and deeper than was best.

He said, it is true, that he cared nothing for it, that it was nothing to him, that it never affected him, and all those things that young men always say when the cup of Circe is beginning its work with them. Friends were annoyed, became anxious, remonstrated; but he laughed at their fears, and insisted on knowing himself best. At last, with a sudden start and shiver of his moral nature, he was awakened to a dreadful perception of his danger, and resolved on decided and determinate resistance. During this period he came to Cincinnati to establish himself in business, and as at this time the temperance reformation was in full tide of success there, he found every thing to strengthen his resolution; temperance meetings and speeches were all the

mode; young men of the first standing were its patrons and supporters; wine was quite in the vocative, and seemed really in danger of being voted out of society. In such a turn of affairs, to sign a temperance pledge and keep it became an easy thing; temptation was scarce presented or felt; he was offered the glass in no social circle, met its attraction nowhere, and flattered himself that he had escaped so great a danger easily and completely.

His usual fortune of social popularity followed him, and his visiting circle became full as large and importunate as a young man with any thing else to do need desire. He was diligent in his application to business, began to be mentioned with approbation by the magnates as a rising young man, and had prospects daily nearing of competence and home, and all that man desires--visions, alas! never to be realized.

For after a while the tide that had risen so high began imperceptibly to decline. Men that had made eloquent speeches on temperance had now other things to look to. Fastidious persons thought that matters had, perhaps, been carried too far, and ladies declared that it was old and threadbare, and getting to be cant and stuff; and the ever-ready wine cup was gliding back into many a circle, as if, on sober second thoughts, the community was convinced that it was a friend unjustly belied.

There is no point in the history of reform, either in communities or individuals, so dangerous as that where danger seems entirely past. As

long as a man thinks his health failing, he watches, he diets, and will undergo the most heroic self-denial; but let him once set himself down as cured, and how readily does he fall back to one soft indulgent habit after another, all tending to ruin every thing that he has before done!

So in communities. Let intemperance rage, and young men go to ruin by dozens, and the very evil inspires the remedy; but when the trumpet has been sounded, and the battle set in array, and the victory only said and sung in speeches, and newspaper paragraphs, and temperance odes, and processions, then comes the return wave; people cry, Enough; the community, vastly satisfied, lies down to sleep in its laurels; and then comes the hour of danger.

But let not the man who has once been swept down the stream of intemperate excitement, almost to the verge of ruin, dream of any point of security for him. He is like one who has awakened in the rapids of Niagara, and with straining oar and wild prayers to Heaven, forced his boat upward into smoother water, where the draught of the current seems to cease, and the banks smile, and all looks beautiful, and weary from rowing, lays by his oar to rest and dream; he knows not that under that smooth water still glides a current, that while he dreams, is imperceptibly but surely hurrying him back whence there is no return.

Harry was just in this perilous point; he viewed danger as long past, his self-confidence was fully restored, and in his security he began to neglect those lighter outworks of caution which he must still guard who

does not mean, at last, to surrender the citadel.

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"Now, girls and boys," said Mrs. G. to her sons and daughters, who were sitting round a centre table covered with notes of invitation, and all the preliminary et cetera of a party, "what shall we have on Friday night?--tea, coffee, lemonade, wine? of course not."

"And why not wine, mamma?" said the young ladies; "the people are beginning to have it; they had wine at Mrs. A.'s and Mrs. B.'s."

"Well, your papa thinks it won't do,--the boys are members of the temperance society,--and I don't think, girls, it will do myself."

There are many good sort of people, by the by, who always view moral questions in this style of phraseology--not what is right, but what will "do."

The girls made an appropriate reply to this view of the subject, by showing that Mrs. A. and Mrs. B. had done the thing, and nobody seemed to make any talk.

The boys, who thus far in the conversation had been thoughtfully rapping their boots with their canes, now interposed, and said that they would rather not have wine if it wouldn't look shabby.

"But it will look shabby," said Miss Fanny. "Lemons, you know, are scarce to be got for any price, and as for lemonade made of sirup, it's positively vulgar and detestable; it tastes just like cream of tartar and spirits of turpentine."

"For my part," said Emma, "I never did see the harm of wine, even when people were making the most fuss about it; to be sure rum and brandy and all that are bad, but wine----"

"And so convenient to get," said Fanny; "and no decent young man ever gets drunk at parties, so it can't do any harm; besides, one must have something, and, as I said, it will look shabby not to have it."

Now, there is no imputation that young men are so much afraid of, especially from the lips of ladies, as that of shabbiness; and as it happened in this case as most others that the young ladies were the most efficient talkers, the question was finally carried on their side.

Mrs. G. was a mild and a motherly woman, just the one fitted to inspire young men with confidence and that home feeling which all men desire to find somewhere. Her house was a free and easy ground, social for most of the young people of her acquaintance, and Harry was a favorite and domesticated visitor.

During the height of the temperance reform, fathers and brothers had



given it their open and decided support, and Mrs. G.--always easily enlisted for any good movement--sympathized warmly in their endeavors. The great fault was, that too often incident to the gentleness of woman--a want of self-reliant principle. Her virtue was too much the result of mere sympathy, too little of her own conviction. Hence, when those she loved grew cold towards a good cause, they found no sustaining power in her, and those who were relying on her judgment and opinions insensibly controlled them. Notwithstanding, she was a woman that always acquired a great influence over young men, and Harry had loved and revered her with something of the same sentiment that he cherished towards his own mother.

It was the most brilliant party of the season. Every thing was got up in faultless taste, and Mrs. G. was in the very spirit of it. The girls were looking beautifully; the rooms were splendid; there was enough and not too much of light and warmth, and all were doing their best to please and be cheerful. Harry was more brilliant than usual, and in fact outdid himself. Wit and mind were the spirit of the hour.

"Just taste this tokay," said one of the sisters to him; "it has just been sent us from Europe, and is said to be a genuine article."

"You know I'm not in that line," said Harry, laughing and coloring.

"Why not?" said another young lady, taking a glass.

"O, the temperance pledge, you know! I am one of the pillars of the order, a very apostle; it will never do for me."

"Pshaw! those temperance pledges are like the proverb, 'something musty,'" said a gay girl.

"Well, but you said you had a headache the beginning of the evening, and you really look pale; you certainly need it as a medicine," said Fanny.

"I'll leave it to mamma;" and she turned to Mrs. G., who stood gayly entertaining a group of young people.

"Nothing more likely," replied she, gayly; "I think, Harry, you have looked pale lately; a glass of wine might do you good."

Had Mrs. G. known all of Harry's past history and temptations, and had she not been in just the inconsiderate state that very good ladies sometimes get into at a party, she would sooner have sacrificed her right hand than to have thrown this observation into the scales; but she did, and they turned the balance for him.

"You shall be my doctor," he said, as, laughing and coloring, he drank the glass--and where was the harm? One glass of wine kills nobody; and yet if a man falls, and knows that in that glass he sacrifices principle and conscience, every drop may be poison to the soul and body.

Harry felt at that very time that a great internal barrier had given

way; nor was that glass the only one that evening; another, and another, and another followed; his spirits rose with the wild and feverish gayety incident to his excitable temperament, and what had been begun in the society of ladies was completed late at night in the gentlemen's saloon.

Nobody ever knew, or thought, or recognized that that one party had forever undone this young man; and yet so it was. From that night his struggle of moral resistance was fatally impaired; not that he yielded at once and without desperate efforts and struggles, but gradually each struggle grew weaker, each reform shorter, each resolution more inefficient; yet at the close of the evening all those friends, mother, brother, and sister, flattered themselves that every thing had gone on so well that the next week Mrs. H. thought that it would do to give wine at the party because Mrs. G. had done it last week, and no harm had come of it.

In about a year after, the G.'s began to notice and lament the habits of their young friend, and all unconsciously to wonder how such a fine young man should be so led astray.

Harry was of a decided and desperate nature; his affections and his moral sense waged a fierce war with the terrible tyrant--the madness that had possessed him; and when at last all hope died out, he determined to avoid the anguish and shame of a drunkard's life by a suicide's death. Then came to the trembling, heart-stricken mother and beloved one a wild, incoherent letter of farewell, and he disappeared

from among the living.

In the same quiet parlor, where the sunshine still streams through flickering leaves, it now rested on the polished sides and glittering plate of a coffin; there at last lay the weary at rest, the soft, shining gray hair was still gleaming as before, but deeper furrows on the wan cheek, and a weary, heavy languor over the pale, peaceful face, told that those gray hairs had been brought down in sorrow to the grave. Sadder still was the story on the cloudless cheek and lips of the young creature bending in quiet despair over her. Poor Ellen! her life's thread, woven with these two beloved ones, was broken.

And may all this happen?--nay, does it not happen?--just such things happen to young men among us every day. And do they not lead in a thousand ways to sorrows just like these? And is there not a responsibility on all who ought to be the guardians of the safety and purity of the other sex, to avoid setting before them the temptation to which so often and so fatally manhood has yielded? What is a paltry consideration of fashion, compared to the safety of sons, brothers, and husbands? The greatest fault of womanhood is slavery to custom; and yet who but woman makes custom? Are not all the usages and fashions of polite society more her work than that of man? And let every mother and sister think of the mothers and sisters of those who come within the range of their influence, and say to themselves, when in thoughtlessness they discuss questions affecting their interests, "Behold thy brother!"--"Behold thy son!"