

ARTHUR

TIMOTHY SHAY

DANGER; OR, WOUNDED
IN THE HOUSE OF A
FRIEND

Timothy Arthur

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T. S. Arthur

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PREFACE

ALL efforts at eradicating evil must, to be successful, begin as near the beginning as possible. It is easier to destroy a weed when but an inch above the ground than after it has attained a rank growth and set its hundred rootlets in the soil. Better if the evil seed were not sown at all; better if the ground received only good seed into its fertile bosom. How much richer and sweeter the harvest!

Bars and drinking-saloons are, in reality, not so much the causes as the effects of intemperance. The chief causes lie back of these, and are to be found in our homes. Bars and drinking-saloons minister to, stimulate and increase the appetite already formed, and give accelerated speed to those whose feet have begun to move along the road to ruin.

In "THREE YEARS IN A MAN-TRAP" the author of this volume uncovered the terrible evils of the liquor traffic; in this, he goes deeper, and unveils the more hidden sources of that widespread ruin which is cursing our land. From the public licensed saloon, where liquor is sold to men—not to boys, except in violation of law—he turns to the private home saloon, where it is given away in unstinted measure to guests of both sexes and of all ages, and seeks to show in a series of swiftly-moving panoramic scenes the dreadful consequences that flow therefrom.

This book is meant by the author to be a startling cry of "DANGER!" Different from "THE MAN-TRAP," as dealing with another aspect of the temperance question, its pictures are wholly unlike those presented in that book, but none the less vivid or intense. It is given as an argument against what is called the temperate use of liquor, and as an exhibition of the fearful disasters that flow from our social drinking customs. In making this argument and exhibition the author has given his best effort to the work.

CHAPTER I

SNOW had been falling for more than three hours, the large flakes dropping silently through the still air until the earth was covered with an even carpet many inches in depth.

It was past midnight. The air, which had been so still, was growing restless and beginning to whirl the snow into eddies and drive it about in an angry kind of way, whistling around sharp corners and rattling every loose sign and shutter upon which it could lay its invisible hands.

In front of an elegant residence stood half a dozen carriages. The glare of light from hall and windows and the sound of music and dancing told of a festival within. The door opened, and a group of young girls, wrapped in shawls and waterproofs, came out and ran, merrily laughing, across the snow-covered pavement, and crowding into one of the carriages, were driven off at a rapid speed. Following them came a young man on whose lip and cheeks the downy beard had scarcely thrown a shadow. The strong light of the vestibule lamp fell upon a handsome face, but it wore an unnatural flush.

There was an unsteadiness about his movements as he descended the marble steps, and he grasped the iron railing like one in danger of falling. A waiter who had followed him to the door stood looking at him with a half-pitying, half-amused expression on his face as he went off, staggering through the blinding drift.

The storm was one of the fiercest of the season, and the air since midnight had become intensely cold. The snow fell no longer in soft and filmy flakes, but in small hard pellets that cut like sand and sifted in through every crack and crevice against which the wild winds drove it.

The young man—boy, we might better say, for, he was only nineteen—moved off in the very teeth of this storm, the small granules of ice smiting him in the face and taking his breath. The wind set itself against him with wide obstructing arms, and he reeled, staggered and plunged forward or from side to side, in a sort of blind desperation.

"Ugh!" he ejaculated, catching his breath and standing still as a fierce blast struck him. Then, shaking himself like one trying to cast aside an impediment, he moved forward with quicker steps, and kept onward, for a distance of two or three blocks. Here, in crossing a street, his foot struck against some obstruction which the snow had concealed, and he fell with his face downward. It took some time for him to struggle to his feet again, and then he seemed to be in a state of complete bewilderment, for he started along one street, going for a short distance, and then crossing back and going in an opposite direction. He was in no condition to get right after once going wrong. With every few steps he would stop and look up and down the street and at the houses on each side vainly trying to make out his locality.

"Police!" he cried two or three times; but the faint, alarmed call reached no ear of nightly guardian. Then, with a shiver as the storm swept down upon him more angrily, he started forward again, going he knew not whither.

The cold benumbed him; the snow choked and blinded him; fear and anxiety, so far as he was capable of feeling them, bewildered and oppressed him. A helmless ship in storm and darkness was in no more pitiable condition than this poor lad.

On, on he went, falling sometimes, but struggling to his feet again and blindly moving forward. All at once he came out from the narrow rows of houses and stood on the edge of what seemed a great white field that stretched away level as a floor. Onward a few paces, and then—Alas for the waiting mother at home! She did not hear the cry of terror that cut the stormy air and lost itself in the louder shriek of the tempest as her son went over the treacherous line of snow and dropped, with a quick plunge, into the river, sinking instantly out of sight, for the tide was up and the ice broken and drifting close to the water's edge.

CHAPTER II

"COME, Fanny," said Mr. Wilmer Voss, speaking to his wife, "you must get to bed. It is past twelve o'clock, and you cannot bear this loss of rest and sleep. It may throw you all back again."

The woman addressed was sitting in a large easychair with a shawl drawn closely about her person. She had the pale, shrunken face and large, bright eyes of a confirmed invalid. Once very beautiful, she yet retained a sweetness of expression which gave a tenderness and charm to every wasted feature. You saw at a glance the cultured woman and the patient sufferer.

As her husband spoke a fierce blast of wind drove the fine sand-like snow against the windows, and then went shrieking and roaring away over housetops, gables and chimneys.

"Oh what a dreadful night!" said the lady, leaning forward in her chair and listening to the wild wail of the storm, while a look of anxiety, mingled with dread, swept across her face. "If Archie were only at home!"

"Don't trouble yourself about Archie. He'll be here soon. You are not yourself to-night, Fanny."

"Perhaps not; but I can't help it. I feel such an awful weight here;" and Mrs. Voss drew her hands against her bosom.

"All nervous," said her husband. "Come! You must go to bed."

"It will be of no use, Wilmer," returned the lady. "I will be worse in bed than sitting up. You don't know what a strange feeling has come over me. Oh, Archie, if you were only at home! Hark! What was that?"

The pale face grew paler as Mrs. Voss bent forward in a listening attitude.

"Only the wind," answered her husband, betraying some impatience. "A thousand strange sounds are on the air in a night like this. You must compose yourself, Fanny, or the worst consequences may follow."

"It's impossible, husband. I cannot rest until I have my son safe and sound at home again. Dear, dear boy!"

Mr. Voss urged no further. The shadow of fear which had come down upon his wife began to creep over his heart and fill it with a vague concern. And now a thought flashed into his mind that he would not have uttered for the world; but from that moment peace fled, and anxiety for his son grew into alarm as the time wore on and the boy did not come home.

"Oh, my husband," cried Mrs. Voss, starting from her chair, and clasping her hands as she threw them upward, "I cannot bear this much longer. Hark! That was his voice! *'Mother!'* *'Mother!'* Don't you hear it?"

Her face was white as the snow without, her eyes wild and eager, her lips apart, her head bent forward.

A shuddering chill crept along the nerves of Mr. Voss.

"Go, go quickly! Run! He may have fallen at the door!"

Ere the last sentence was finished Mr. Voss was halfway down stairs. A blinding dash of snow came swirling into his face as he opened the street door. It was some moments before he could see with any distinctness. No human form was visible, and the lamp just in front of his house shone down upon a trackless bed of snow many inches in depth. No, Archie was not there. The cry had come to the mother's inward ear in the moment when her boy went plunging down into the engulfing river and heart and thought turned in his mortal agony to the one nearest and dearest in all the earth.

When Mr. Voss came back into the house after his fruitless errand, he found his wife standing in the hall, only a few feet back from the vestibule, her face whiter, if that were possible, and her eyes wilder than before. Catching her in his arms, he ran with her up stairs, but before he had reached their chamber her light form lay nerveless and unconscious against his breast.

Doctor Hillhouse, the old family physician, called up in the middle of that stormy night, hesitated to obey the summons, and sent his assistant with word that he would be round early in the morning if needed. Doctor Angier, the assistant, was a young physician of fine ability and great promise. Handsome in person, agreeable in manner and thoroughly in love with his profession, he was rapidly coming into favor with many of the old doctor's patients, the larger portion of whom belonged to wealthy and fashionable circles. Himself a member of one of the older families, and connected, both on his father's and mother's side, with eminent personages as well in his native city as in the State, Doctor Angier was naturally drawn into social life, which, spite of his increasing professional duties, he found time to enjoy.

It was past two o'clock when Doctor Angier made his appearance, his garments white with snow and his dark beard crusted with tiny icicles. He found Mrs. Voss lying in swoon so deep that, but for the faintest perceptible heart-beat, he would have thought her dead. Watching the young physician closely as he stood by the bedside of his wife, Mr. Voss was quick to perceive something unusual in his manner. The professional poise and coolness for which he was noted were gone, and he showed a degree of excitement and uncertainty that alarmed the anxious husband. What was its meaning? Did it indicate apprehension for the condition of his patient, or—something else? A closer look into the young physician's face sent a flash of suspicion through the mind of Mr. Voss, which was more than confirmed a moment afterward as the stale odor of wine floated to his nostrils.

"Were you at Mr. Birtwell's to-night?" There was a thrill of anxious suspense in the tones of Mr. Voss as he grasped the physician's arm and looked keenly at him.

"I was," replied Doctor Angier.

"Did you see my son there?"

"Yes, sir."

"At what time did you leave?"

"Less than an hour ago. I had not retired when your summons came."

"Was Archie there when you left?"

"No, I think not."

"Are you sure about it?"

"Yes, very sure. I remember now, quite distinctly, seeing him come down from the dressing-room with his hat in his hand and go through the hall toward the street door."

"How long ago was that?"

"About an hour and a half; perhaps longer."

A groan that could not be repressed broke from the father's lips.

"Isn't he at home?" asked the young physician, turning round quickly from the bed and betraying a sudden concern.

"No; and I am exceedingly anxious about him." The eyes of Mr. Voss were fixed intently on Doctor Angier, and he was reading every varying expression of his countenance.

"Doctor," he said, laying his hand on the physician's arm and speaking huskily, "I want you to answer me truly. Had he taken much wine?"

It was some moments before Doctor Angier replied:

"On such occasions most people take wine freely. It flows like water, you know. I don't think your son indulged more than any one else; indeed, not half so much as some young men I saw there."

Mr. Voss felt that there was evasion in the answer.

"Archie is young, and not used to wine. A single glass would be more to him than half a dozen to older men who drink habitually. Did you see him take wine often?"

"He was in the supper-room for a considerable time. When I left it, I saw him in the midst of a group of young men and girls, all with glasses of champagne in their hands."

"How long was this before you saw him go away?"

"Half an hour, perhaps," replied the doctor.

"Did he go out alone?"

"I believe so."

Mr. Voss questioned no further, and Doctor Angler, who now understood better the meaning of his patient's condition, set himself to the work of restoring her to consciousness. He did not find the task easy. It was many hours before the almost stilled pulses began beating again with a perceptible stroke, and the quiet chest to give signs of normal respiration. Happily for the poor mother, thought and feeling were yet bound.

Long before this the police had been aroused and every effort made to discover a trace of the young man after he left the house of Mr. Birtwell, but without effect. The snow had continued falling until after five o'clock, when the storm ceased and the sky cleared, the wind blowing from the north and the temperature falling to within a few degrees of zero.

A faint hope lingered with Mr. Voss—the hope that Archie had gone home with some friend. But as the morning wore on and he did not make his appearance this hope began to fade away, and died before many hours. Nearly every male guest at Mrs. Birtwell's party was seen and questioned during the day, but not one of them had seen Archie after he left the house. A waiter who was questioned said that he remembered seeing him:

"I watched him go down the steps and go off alone, and the wind seemed as if it would blow him away. He wasn't just himself, sir, I'm afraid."

If a knife had cut down into the father's quivering flesh, the pain would have been as nothing to that inflicted by this last sentence. It only confirmed his worst fears.

The afternoon papers contained a notice of the fact that a young gentleman who had gone away from a fashionable party at a late hour on the night before had not been heard of by his friends, who were anxious and distressed about him. Foul play was hinted at, as the young man wore a valuable diamond pin and had a costly gold watch in his pocket. On the morning afterward advertisements appeared offering a large reward for any information that would lead to the discovery of the young man, living or dead. They were accompanied by minute descriptions of his person and dress. But there came no response. Days and weeks passed; and though the advertisements were repeated and newspapers called public attention to the matter, not a single clue was found.

A young man, with the kisses of his mother sweet on his pure lips, had left her for an evening's social enjoyment at the house of one of her closest and dearest friends, and she never looked upon his face again. He had entered the house of that friend with a clear head and steady nerves, and he had gone out at midnight bewildered with the wine that had been poured without stint to her hundred guests, young and old. How it had fared with him the reader knows too well.

CHAPTER III

"HEAVENS and earth! Why doesn't some one go to the door?" exclaimed Mr. Spencer Birtwell, rousing himself from a heavy sleep as the bell was rung for the third time, and now with four or five vigorous and rapid jerks, each of which caused the handle of the bell to strike with the noise of a hammer.

The gray dawn was just breaking.

"There it is again! Good heavens! What does it mean?" and Mr. Birtwell, now fairly awake, started up in bed and sat listening. Scarcely a moment intervened before the bell was pulled again, and this time continuously for a dozen times. Springing from the bed, Mr. Birtwell threw open a window, and looking out, saw two policemen at the door.

"What's wanted?" he called down to them.

"Was there a young man here last night named Voss?" inquired one of the men.

"What about him?" asked Mr. Birtwell.

"He hasn't been home, and his friends are alarmed. Do you know where he is?"

"Wait, returned Mr. Birtwell; and shutting down the window, he dressed himself hurriedly.

"What is it?" asked his wife, who had been awakened from a heavy slumber by the noise at the window.

"Archie Voss didn't get home last night."

"What?" and Mrs. Birtwell started out of bed.

"There are two policemen at the door."

"Policemen!"

"Yes; making a grand row for nothing, as if young men never stayed away from home. I must go down and see them. Go back into bed again, Margaret. You'll take your death o' cold. There's nothing to be alarmed about. He'll come up all right."

But Mrs. Birtwell did not return to her bed. With warm wrapper thrown about her person, she stood at the head of the stairway while her husband went down to admit the policemen. All that could be learned from them was that Archie Voss had not come home from the party, and that his friends were greatly alarmed about him. Mr. Birtwell had no information to give. The young man had been at his house, and had gone away some time during the night, but precisely at what hour he could not tell.

"You noticed him through the evening?" said one of the policemen.

"Oh yes, certainly. We know Archie very well. He's always been intimate at our house."

"Did he take wine freely?"

An indignant denial leaped to Mr. Birtwell's tongue, but the words died unspoken, for the image of Archie, with flushed face and eyes too bright for sober health, holding in his hand a glass of sparkling champagne, came vividly before him.

"Not more freely than other young men," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"There are two theories of his absence," said the policeman. "One is that he has been set upon in the street, robbed and murdered, and the other that, stupefied and bewildered by drink, he lost himself in the storm, and lies somewhere frozen to death and hidden under the snow."

A cry of pain broke from the lips of Mrs. Birtwell, and she came hurrying down stairs. Too well did she remember the condition of Archie when she last saw him—Archie, the only son of her oldest and dearest friend, the friend she had known and loved since girlhood. He was not fit to go out alone in that cold and stormy night; and a guilty sense of responsibility smote upon her heart and set aside all excuses.

"What about his mother?" she asked, anxiously. "How is she bearing this dreadful suspense?"

"I can't just say, ma'am," was answered, "but I think they've had the doctor with her all night—that is, all the last part of the night. She's lying in a faint, I believe."

"Oh, it will kill her! Poor Frances! Poor Frances!" wailed out Mrs. Birtwell, wringing her hands and beginning to cry bitterly.

"The police have been on the lookout for the last two or three hours, but can't find any trace of him," said the officer.

"Oh, he'll turn up all right," broke in Mr. Birtwell, with a confident tone. "It's only a scare. Gone home with some young friend, as like as not. Young fellows in their teens don't get lost in the snow, particularly in the streets of a great city, and footpads generally know their game before bringing it down. I'm sorry for poor Mrs. Voss; she isn't strong enough to bear such a shock. But it will all come right; I don't feel a bit concerned."

But for all that he did feel deeply concerned. The policemen went away, and Mr. and Mrs. Birtwell sat down by an open grate in which the fire still burned.

"Don't let it distress you so, Margaret," said the former, trying to comfort his wife. "There's nothing to fear for Archie. Nobody ever heard of a man getting lost in a city snow-storm. If he'd been out on a prairie, the case would have been different, but in the streets of the city! The thing's preposterous, Margaret."

"Oh, if he'd only gone away as he came, I wouldn't feel so awfully about it," returned Mrs. Birtwell. "That's what cuts me to the heart. To think that he came to my house sober and went away—"

She caught back from her tongue the word she would have spoken, and shivered.

"Nothing of the kind, Margaret, nothing of the kind," said her husband, quickly. "A little gay—that was all. Just what is seen at parties every night. Archie hasn't much head, and a single glass of champagne is enough to set it buzzing. But it's soon over. The effervescence goes off in a little while, and the head comes clear again."

Mrs. Birtwell did not reply. Her eyes were cast down and her face deeply distressed.

"If anything has happened to Archie," she said, after a long silence, "I shall never have a moment's peace as long as I live."

"Nonsense, Margaret! Suppose something has happened to him? We are not responsible. It's his own fault if he took away more wine than he was able to carry." Mr. Birtwell spoke with slight irritation.

"If he hadn't found the wine here, he could not have carried it away," replied his wife.

"How wildly you talk, Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Birtwell, with increased irritation.

"We won't discuss the matter," said his wife. "It would be useless, agreement being, I fear, out of the question; but it is very certain that we cannot escape responsibility in this or anything else we may do, and so long as these words of Holy Writ stand, '*Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth the bottle to him and maketh him drunken*', we may well have serious doubts in regard to the right and wrong of these fashionable entertainments, at which wine and spirits are made free to all of both sexes, young and old."

Mr. Birtwell started to his feet and walked the floor with considerable excitement.

"If *we* had a son just coming to manhood—and I sometimes thank God that we have not—would you feel wholly at ease about him, wholly satisfied that he was in no danger in the houses of your friends? May not a young man as readily acquire a taste for liquors in a gentleman's dining-room as in a drinking-saloon—nay, more readily, if in the former the wine is free and bright eyes and laughing lips press him with invitations?"

Mrs. Birtwell's voice had gained a steadiness and force that made it very impressive. Her husband continued to walk the floor but with slower steps.

"I saw things last night that troubled me," she went on. "There is no disguising the fact that most of the young men who come to these large parties spend a great deal too much time in the supper-room, and drink a great deal more than is good for them. Archie Voss was not the only one who did this last evening. I watched another young man very closely, and am sorry to say that he left our house in a condition in which no mother waiting at home could receive her son without sorrow and shame."

"Who was that?" asked Mr. Birtwell, turning quickly upon his wife. He had detected more than a common concern in her voice.

"Ellis," she replied. Her manner was very grave.

"You must be mistaken about that," said Mr. Birtwell, evidently disturbed at this communication.

"I wish to Heaven that I were! But the fact was too apparent. Blanche saw it, and tried to get him out of the supper-room. He acted in the silliest kind of a way, and mortified her dreadfully, poor child!"

"Such things will happen sometimes," said Mr. Birtwell. "Young men like Ellis don't always know how much they can bear." His voice was in a lower key and a little husky.

"It happens too often with Ellis," replied his wife, "and I'm beginning to feel greatly troubled about it."

"Has it happened before?"

"Yes; at Mrs. Gleason's, only last week. He was loud and boisterous in the supper-room—so much so that I heard a lady speak of his conduct as disgraceful."

"That will never do," exclaimed Mr. Birtwell, betraying much excitement. "He will have to change all this or give up Blanche. I don't care what his family is if he isn't all right himself."

"It is easier to get into trouble than out of it," was replied. "Things have gone too far between them."

"I don't believe it. Blanche will never throw herself away on a man of bad habits."

"No; I do not think she will. But there may be, in her view, a very great distance between an occasional glass of wine too much at an evening party and confirmed bad habits. We must not hope to make her see with our eyes, nor to take our judgment of a case in which her heart is concerned. Love is full of excuses and full of faith. If Ellis Whitford should, unhappily, be overcome by this accursed appetite for drink which is destroying so many of our most promising young men, there is trouble ahead for her and for us."

"Something must be done about it. We cannot let this thing go on," said Mr. Birtwell, in a kind of helpless passion. "A drunkard is a beast. Our Blanche tied to a beast! Ugh! Ellis must be talked to. I shall see him myself. If he gets offended, I cannot help it. There's too much at stake—too much, too much!"

"Talking never does much in these cases," returned Mrs. Birtwell, gloomily. "Ellis would be hurt and offended."

"So far so good. He'd be on guard at the next party."

"Perhaps so. But what hope is there for a young man in any danger of acquiring a love of liquor as things now are in our best society? He cannot always be on guard. Wine is poured for him everywhere. He may go unharmed in his daily walks through the city though thousands of drinking-saloons crowd its busy streets. They may hold out their enticements for him in vain. But he is too weak to refuse the tempting glass when a fair hostess offers it, or when, in the midst of a gay company wine is in every hand and at every lip. One glass taken, and caution and restraint are too often forgotten. He drinks with this one and that one, until his clear head is gone and appetite, like a watchful spider, throws another cord of its fatal web around him."

"I don't see what we are to do about it," said Mr. Birtwell. "If men can't control themselves—" He did not finish the sentence.

"We can at least refrain from putting temptation in their way," answered his wife.

"How?"

"We can refuse to turn our houses into drinking-saloons," replied Mrs. Birtwell, voice and manner becoming excited and intense.

"Margaret, Margaret, you are losing yourself," said the astonished husband.

"No; I speak the words of truth and soberness," she answered, her face rising in color and her eyes brightening. "What great difference is there between a drinking-saloon, where liquor is sold, and a gentleman's dining-room, where it is given away? The harm is great in both—greatest, I fear, in the latter, where the weak and unguarded are allured and their tastes corrupted. There is a ban on the drinking-saloon. Society warns young men not to enter its tempting doors. It is called the way of death and hell. What makes it accursed and our home saloon harmless? It is all wrong, Mr. Birtwell—all wrong, wrong, wrong! and to-day we are tasting some of the fruit, the bitterness of which, I fear, will be in our mouths so long as we both shall live."

Mrs. Birtwell broke down, and sinking back in her chair, covered her face with her hands.

"I must go to Frances," she said, rising after a few moments.

"Not now, Margaret," interposed her husband. "Wait for a while. Archie is neither murdered nor frozen to death; you may take my word for that. Wait until the morning advances, and he has time to put in an appearance, as they say. Henry can go round after breakfast and make inquiry about him. If he is still absent, then you might call and see Mrs. Voss. At present the snow lies inches deep and unbroken on the street, and you cannot possibly go out."

Mrs. Birtwell sat down again, her countenance more distressed.

"Oh, if it hadn't happened in our house!" she said. "If this awful thing didn't lie at our door!"

"Good Heavens, Margaret! why will you take on so? Any one hearing you talk might think us guilty of murder, or some other dreadful crime. Even if the worst fears are realized, no blame can lie with us. Parties are given every night, and young men, and old men too, go home from them with lighter heads than when they came. No one is compelled to drink more than is good for him. If he takes too much, the sin lies at his own door."

"If you talked for ever, Mr. Birtwell," was answered "nothing you might say could possibly change my feelings or sentiments. I know we are responsible both to God and to society for the stumbling-blocks we set in the way of others. For a long time, as you know, I have felt this in regard to our social wine-drinking customs; and if I could have had my way, there would have been one large party of the season at which neither man nor woman could taste wine."

"I know," replied Mr. Birtwell. "But I didn't choose to make myself a laughing-stock. If we are in society, we must do as society does. Individuals are not responsible for social usages. They take things as they find them, going with the current, and leaving society to settle for itself its code of laws and customs. If we don't like these laws and customs, we are free to drift out of the current. But to set ourselves against them is a weakness and a folly."

Mr. Birtwell's voice and manner grew more confident as he spoke. He felt that he had closed the argument.

"If society," answered his wife, "gets wrong, how is it to get right?"

Mr. Birtwell was silent.

"Is it not made up of individuals?"

"Of course."

"And is not each of the individuals responsible, in his degree, for the conduct of society?"

"In a certain sense, yes."

"Society, as a whole, cannot determine a question of right and wrong. Only individuals can do this. Certain of these, more independent than the rest, pass now and then from the beaten track of custom, and the great mass follow them. Because they do this or that, it is right or in good taste and becomes fashionable. The many are always led by the few. It is through the personal influence of the leaders in social life that society is now cursed by its drinking customs. Personal influence alone can change these customs, and therefore every individual becomes responsible, because he might if he would set his face against them, and any one brave enough to do this would find many weaker ones quick to come to his side and help him to form a better social sentiment and a better custom."

"All very nicely said," replied Mr. Birtwell, "but I'd like to see the man brave enough to give a large fashionable party and exclude wine."

"So would I. Though every lip but mine kept silence, there would be one to do him honor."

"You would be alone, I fear," said the husband.

"When a man does a right and brave thing, all true men honor him in their hearts. All may not be brave enough to stand by his side, but a noble few will imitate the good example. Give the leader in any cause, right or wrong, and you will always find adherents of the cause. No, my husband, I would not be alone in doing that man honor. His praise would be on many lips and many hearts would bless him. I only wish you were that man! Spencer, if you will consent to take this lead, I will walk among our guests the queenliest woman, in heart at least, to be found in any drawing-room this season. I shall not be without my maids-of-honor, you may be sure, and they will come from the best families known in our city. Come! say yes, and I will be prouder of my husband than if he were the victorious general of a great army."

"No, thank you, my dear," replied Mr. Birtwell, not in the least moved by his wife's enthusiasm. "I am not a social reformer, nor in the least inclined that way. As I find things I take them. It is no fault of mine that some people have no control of their appetites and passions. Men will abuse almost anything to their own hurt. I saw as many of our guests over-eat last night as over-drink, and there will be quite as many headaches to-day from excess of terrapin and oysters as from excess of wine. It's no use, Margaret. Intemperance is not to be cured in this way. Men who have a taste for wine will get it, if not in one place then in another; if not in a gentleman's dining-room, then in a drinking-saloon, or somewhere else."

The glow faded from Mrs. Birtwell's face and the light went out of her eyes. Her voice was husky and choking as she replied:

"One fact does not invalidate another. Because men who have acquired a taste for wine will have it whether we provide it for them or not, it is no reason why we should set it before the young whose appetites are yet unvitiated and lure them to excesses. It does not make a free indulgence in wine and brandy any the more excusable because men overeat themselves."

"But," broke in Mr. Birtwell, with the manner of one who gave an unanswerable reason, "if we exclude wine that men may not hurt themselves by over-indulgence, why not exclude the oysters and terrapin? If we set up for reformers and philanthropists, why not cover the whole ground?"

"Oysters and terrapin," replied Mrs. Birtwell, in a voice out of which she could hardly keep the contempt she felt for her husband's weak rejoinder, "don't confuse the head, dethrone the reason, brutalize, debase and ruin men in soul and body as do wine and brandy. The difference lies there, and all men see and feel it, make what excuses they will for self-indulgence and deference to custom. The curse of drink is too widely felt. There is scarcely a family in the land on which its blight does not lie. The best, the noblest, the purest, the bravest, have fallen. It is breaking hopes and hearts and fortunes every day. The warning cross that marks the grave of some poor victim hurts your eyes at every turn of life. We are left without excuse."

Mrs. Birtwell rose as she finished speaking, and returned to her chamber.

CHAPTER IV

"MR. VOSS," said the waiter as he opened the door of the breakfast-room.

Mr. and Mrs. Birtwell left the table hurriedly and went to the parlor. Their visitor was standing in the middle of the floor as they entered.

"Oh, Mr. Voss, have you heard anything of Archie?" exclaimed Mrs. Birtwell.

"Nothing yet," he replied.

"Dreadful, dreadful! What can it mean?"

"Don't be alarmed about it," said Mr. Birtwell, trying to speak in an assuring voice. "He must have gone home with a friend. It will be all right, I am confident."

"I trust so," replied Mr. Voss. "But I cannot help feeling very anxious. He has never been away all night before. Something is wrong. Do you know precisely at what time he left here?"

"I do not," replied Mr. Birtwell. "We had a large company, and I did not note particularly the coming or going of any one."

"Doctor Angier thinks it was soon after twelve o'clock. He saw him come out of the dressing-room and go down stairs about that time."

"How is Frances?" asked Mrs. Birtwell. "It must be a dreadful shock to her in her weak state."

"Yes, it is dreadful, and I feel very anxious about her. If anything has happened to Archie, it will kill her."

Tears fell over Mrs. Birtwell's face and she wrung her hands in distress.

"She is calmer than she was," said Mr. Voss. "The first alarm and suspense broke her right down, and she was insensible for some hours. But she is bearing it better now—much better than I had hoped for."

"I will go to see her at once. Oh, if I knew how to comfort her!"

To this Mr. Voss made no response, but Mrs. Birtwell, who was looking into his face, saw an expression that she did not understand.

"She will see me, of course?"

"I do not know. Perhaps you'd better not go round yet. It might disturb her too much, and the doctor says she must be kept as quiet as possible."

Something in the manner of Mr. Voss sent a chill to the heart of Mrs. Birtwell. She felt an evasion in his reply. Then a suspicion of the truth flashed upon her mind, overwhelming her with a flood of bitterness in which shame, self-reproach, sorrow and distress were mingled. It was from her hand, so to speak, that the son of her friend had taken the wine which had bewildered his senses, and from her house that he had gone forth with unsteady step and confused brain to face a storm the heaviest and wildest that had been known for years. If he were dead, would not the stain of his blood be on her garments?

No marvel that Mr. Voss had said, "Not yet; it might disturb her too much." Disturb the friend with whose heart her own had beaten in closest sympathy and tenderest love for years—the friend who had flown to her in the deepest sorrow she had ever known and held her to her heart until she was comforted by the sweet influences of love. Oh, this was hard to bear! She bowed her head and stood silent.

"I wish," said Mr. Voss, speaking to Mr. Birtwell, "to get the names of a few of the guests who were here last night. Some of them may have seen Archie go out, or may have gone away at the time he did. I must find some clue to the mystery of his absence."

Mr. Birtwell named over many of his guests, and Mr. Voss made a note of their addresses. The chill went deeper down into the heart of Mrs. Birtwell; and when Mr. Voss, who seemed to grow colder and more constrained every moment, without looking at her, turned to go away, the pang that cut her bosom was sharp and terrible.

"If I can do anything, Mr. Voss, command—" Mr. Birtwell had gone to the door with his visitor, who passed out hastily, not waiting to hear the conclusion of his sentence.

"A little strange in his manner, I should say," remarked Mr. Birtwell as he came back. "One might infer that he thought us to blame for his son's absence."

"I can't bear this suspense. I must see Frances." It was an hour after Mr. Voss had been there. Mrs. Birtwell rang a bell, and ordering the carriage, made herself ready to go out.

"Mrs. Voss says you must excuse her," said the servant who had taken up Mrs. Birtwell's card. "She is not seeing any but the family," added the man, who saw in the visitor's face the pain of a great disappointment.

Slowly retiring, her head bent forward and her body stooping a little like one pressed down by a burden, Mrs. Birtwell left the house of her oldest and dearest friend with an aching sense of rejection at her heart. In the darkest and saddest hour of her life that friend had turned from the friend who had been to her more than a sister, refusing the sympathy and tears she had come to offer. There was a bitter cup at the lips of both; which was the bitterest it would be hard to tell.

"Not now," Mrs. Voss had said, speaking to her husband; "I cannot meet her now."

"Perhaps you had better see her," returned the latter.

"No, no, no!" Mrs. Voss put up her hands and shivered as she spoke. "I cannot, I cannot! Oh, my boy! my son! my poor Archie! Where are you? Why do you not come home? Hark!"

The bell had rung loudly. They listened, and heard men's voices in the hall below. With face flushing and paling in quick alternations, Mrs. Voss started up in bed and leaned forward, hearkening eagerly. Mr. Voss opened the chamber door and went out. Two policemen had come to report that so far all efforts to find a trace of the young man had been utterly fruitless. Mrs. Voss heard in silence. Slowly the dark lashes fell upon her cheeks, that were white as marble. Her lips were rigid and closely shut, her hands clenched tightly. So she struggled with the fear and agony that were assaulting her life.

CHAPTER V

A HANDSOME man of forty-five stood lingering by the bedside of his wife, whose large tender eyes looked up at him almost wistfully. A baby's head, dark with beautiful hair that curled in scores of silken ringlets, lay close against her bosom. The chamber was not large nor richly furnished, though everything was in good taste and comfortable. A few articles were out of harmony with the rest and hinted at better days. One of these was a large secretary of curious workmanship, inlaid with costly woods and pearl and rich with carvings. Another was a small mantel clock of exquisite beauty. Two or three small but rare pictures hung on the walls.

Looking closely into the man's strong intellectual face, you would have seen something that marred the harmony of its fine features and dimmed its clear expression—something to stir a doubt or awaken a feeling of concern. The eyes, that were deep and intense, had a shadow in them, and the curves of the mouth had suffering and passion and evidences of stern mental conflict in every line. This was no common man, no social drone, but one who in his contact with men was used to making himself felt.

"Come home early, Ralph, won't you?" said his wife.

The man bent down and kissed her, and then pressed his lips to the baby's head.

"Yes, dear; I don't mean to stay late. If it wasn't for the expectation of meeting General Logan and one or two others that I particularly wish to see, I wouldn't go at all. I have to make good, you know, all the opportunities that come in my way."

"Oh yes, I know. You must go, of course." She had taken her husband's hand, and was holding it with a close pressure. He had to draw it away almost by force.

"Good-night, dear, and God bless you." His voice trembled a little. He stooped and kissed her again. A moment after and she was alone. Then all the light went out of her face and a deep shadow fell quickly over it. She shut her eyes, but not tightly enough to hold back the tears that soon came creeping slowly out from beneath the closed lashes.

Ralph Ridley was a lawyer of marked ability. A few years before, he had given up a good practice at the bar for an office under the State government. Afterward he was sent to Congress and passed four years in Washington. Like too many of our ablest public men, the temptations of that city were too much for him. It was the old sad story that repeats itself every year. He fell a victim to the drinking customs of our national capital. Everywhere and on all social occasions invitations to wine met him. He drank with a friend on his way to the House, and with another in the Capitol buildings before taking his seat for business. He drank at lunch and at dinner, and he drank more freely at party or levee in the evening. Only in the early morning was he free from the bewildering effects of liquor.

Four years of such a life broke down his manhood. Hard as he sometimes struggled to rise above the debasing appetite that had enslaved him, resolution snapped like thread in a flame with every new temptation. He stood erect and hopeful to-day, and to-morrow lay prone and despairing under the heel of his enemy.

At the end of his second term in Congress the people of his district rejected him. They could tolerate a certain degree of drunkenness and demoralization in their representative, but Ridley had fallen too low. They would have him no longer, and so he was left out in the party nomination and sent back into private life hurt, humiliated and in debt. No clients awaited his return. His law-office had been closed for years, and there was little encouragement to open it again in the old place. For some weeks after his failure to get the nomination Ridley drank more desperately than ever, and was in a state of intoxication nearly all the while. His poor wife, who clung to him through all with an unwavering fidelity, was nearly broken-hearted. In vain had relatives and friends interposed. No argument nor persuasion could induce her to abandon him. "He is my husband," was her only reply, "and I will not leave him."

One night he was brought home insensible. He had fallen in the street where some repairs were being made, and had received serious injuries which confined him to the house for two or three weeks. This gave time for reflection and repentance. The shame and remorse that filled his soul as he looked at his sad, pale wife and neglected children, and thought of his tarnished name and lost opportunities, spurred him to new and firmer resolves than ever before made. He could go forward no longer without utter ruin. No hope was left but in turning back. He must set his face in a new direction, and he vowed to do so, promising God on his knees in tears and agony to hold, by his vow sacredly.

A new day had dawned. As soon as Mr. Ridley was well enough to be out again he took counsel of friends, and after careful deliberation resolved to leave his native town and remove to the city. A lawyer of fine ability, and known to the public as a clear thinker and an able debater, he had made quite an impression on the country during his first term in Congress; neither he nor his friends had any doubt as to his early success, provided he was able to keep himself free from the thralldom of old habits.

A few old friends and political associates made up a purse to enable him to remove to the city with his family. An office was taken and three rooms rented in a small house, where, with his wife and two children, one daughter in her fourteenth year, life was started anew. There was no room for a servant in this small establishment even if he had been able to pay the hire of one.

So the new beginning was made. A man of Mr. Ridley's talents and reputation could not long remain unemployed. In the very first week he had a client and a retaining fee of twenty-five dollars. The case was an important one, involving some nice questions of mercantile law. It came up for argument in the course of a few weeks, and gave the opportunity he wanted. His management of the case was so superior to that of the opposing counsel, and his citations of law and precedent so cumulative and explicit, that he gained not only an easy victory, but made for himself a very favorable impression.

After that business began gradually to flow in upon him, and he was able to gather in sufficient to keep his family, though for some time only in a very humble way. Having no old acquaintances in the city, Mr. Ridley was comparatively free from temptation. He was promptly at his office in the morning, never leaving it, except to go into court or some of the public offices on business, until the hour arrived for returning home.

A new life had become dominant, a new ambition was ruling him. Hope revived in the heart of his almost despairing wife, and the future looked bright again. His eyes had grown clear and confident once more and his stooping shoulders square and erect. In his bearing you saw the old stateliness and conscious sense of power. Men treated him with deference and respect.

In less than a year Mr. Ridley was able to remove his family into a better house and to afford the expense of a servant. So far they had kept out of the city's social life. Among strangers and living humbly, almost meanly, they neither made nor received calls nor had invitations to evening entertainments; and herein lay Mr. Ridley's safety. It was on his social side that he was weakest. He could hold himself above appetite and deny its cravings if left to the contest alone. The drinking-saloons whose hundred doors he had to pass daily did not tempt him, did not cause his firm steps to pause nor linger. His sorrow and shame for the past and his solemn promises and hopes for the future were potent enough to save him from all such allurements. For him their doors stood open in vain. The path of danger lay in another direction. He would have to be taken unawares. If betrayed at all, it must be, so to speak, in the house of a friend. The Delilah of "good society" must put caution and conscience to sleep and then rob him of his strength.

The rising man at the bar of a great city who had already served two terms in Congress could not long remain in social obscurity; and as it gradually became known in the "best society" that Mrs. Ridley stood connected with some of the "best families" in the State, one and another began to call upon her and to court her acquaintance, even though she was living in comparative obscurity and in a humble way.

At first regrets were returned to all invitations to evening entertainments, large or small. Mr. Ridley very well understood why his wife, who was social and naturally fond of company, was so prompt to decline. He knew that the excuse, "We are not able to give parties in return," was not really the true one. He knew that she feared the temptation that would come to him, and he was by no means insensible to the perils that would beset him whenever he found himself in the midst of a convivial company, with the odor of wine heavy on the air and invitations to drink meeting him at every turn.

But this could not always be. Mr. and Mrs. Ridley could not for ever hold themselves away from the social life of a large city among the people of which their acquaintance was gradually extending. Mrs. Ridley would have continued to stand aloof because of the danger she had too good reason to fear, but her husband was growing, she could see, both sensitive and restless. He wanted the professional advantages society would give him, and he wanted, moreover, to prove his manhood and take away the reproach under which he felt himself lying.

Sooner or later he must walk this way of peril, and he felt that he was becoming strong enough and brave enough to meet the old enemy that had vanquished him so many times.

"We will go," he said, on receiving cards of invitation to a party given by a prominent and influential citizen. "People will be there whom I should meet, and people whom I want you to meet."

He saw a shadow creep into his wife's face; Mrs. Ridley saw the shadow reflected almost as a frown from his. She knew what was in her husband's thoughts, knew that he felt hurt and restless under her continued reluctance to have him go into any company where wine and spirits were served to the guests, and feeling that a longer opposition might do more harm than good, answered, with as much heartiness and assent as she could get into her voice:

"Very well, but it will cost you the price of a new dress, for I have nothing fit to appear in."

The shadow swept off Mr. Ridley's face.

"All right," he returned. "I received a fee of fifty dollars to-day, and you shall have every cent; of it."

In the week that intervened Mrs. Ridley made herself ready for the party; but had she been preparing for a funeral, her heart could scarcely have been heavier. Fearful dreams haunted her sleep, and through the day imagination would often draw pictures the sight of which made her cry out in sudden pain and fear. All this she concealed from her husband, and affected to take a pleased interest in the coming entertainment.

Mrs. Ridley was still a handsome woman, and her husband felt the old pride warming his bosom when he saw her again among brilliant and attractive women and noted the impression she made. He watched her with something of the proud interest a mother feels for a beautiful daughter who makes her appearance in society for the first time, and his heart beat with liveliest pleasure as he noticed the many instances in which she attracted and held people by the grace of her manner and the charm of her conversation.

"God bless her!" he said in his heart fervently as the love he bore her warmed into fresher life and moved him with a deeper tenderness, and then he made for her sake a new vow of abstinence and set anew the watch and ward upon his appetite. And he had need of watch and ward. The wine-merchant's bill for that evening's entertainment was over eight hundred dollars, and men and women, girls and boys, all drank in unrestrained freedom.

Mrs. Ridley, without seeming to do so, kept close to her husband while he was in the supper-room, and he, as if feeling the power of her protecting influence, was pleased to have her near. The smell of wine, its sparkle in the glasses, the freedom and apparent safety with which every one drank, the frequent invitations received, and the little banter and half-surprised lifting of the eyebrows that came now and then upon refusal were no light draught on Mr. Ridley's strength.

"Have you tried this sherry, Mr. Ridley?" said the gentlemanly host, taking a bottle from the supper-table and filling two glasses. "It is very choice." He lifted one of the glasses as he spoke and handed it to his guest. There was a flattering cordiality in his manner that made the invitation almost

irresistible, and moreover he was a prominent and influential citizen whose favorable consideration Mr. Ridley wished to gain. If his wife had not been standing by his side, he would have accepted the glass, and for what seemed good breeding's sake have sipped a little, just tasting its flavor, so that he could compliment his host upon its rare quality.

"Thank you," Mr. Ridley was able to say, "but I do not take wine." His voice was not clear and manly, but unsteady and weak.

"Oh, excuse me," said the gentleman, setting down the glass quickly. "I was not aware of that." He stood as if slightly embarrassed for a moment, and then, turning to a clergyman who stood close by, said:

"Will you take a glass of wine with me, Mr. Elliott?"

An assenting smile broke into Mr. Elliott's face, and he reached for the glass which Mr. Ridley had just refused.

"Something very choice," said the host.

The clergyman tasted and sipped with the air of a connoisseur.

"Very choice indeed, sir," he replied. "But you always have good wine."

Mrs. Ridley drew her hand in her husband's arm and leaned upon it.

"If it is to be had," returned the host, a little, proudly; "and I generally know where to get it. A good glass of wine I count among the blessings for which one may give thanks—wine, I mean, not drugs."

"Exactly; wine that is pure hurts no one, unless, indeed, his appetite has been vitiated through alcoholic indulgence, and even then I have sometimes thought that the moderate use of strictly pure wine would restore the normal taste and free a man from the tyranny of an enslaving vice."

That sentence took quick hold upon the thought of Mr. Ridley. It gave him a new idea, and he listened with keen interest to what followed.

"You strike the keynote of a true temperance reformation, Mr. Elliott," returned the host. "Give men pure wine instead of the vile stuff that bears its name, and you will soon get rid of drunkenness. I have always preached that doctrine."

"And I imagine you are about right," answered Mr. Elliott. "Wine is one of God's gifts, and must be good. If men abuse it sometimes, it is nothing more than they do with almost every blessing the Father of all mercies bestows upon his children. The abuse of a thing is no argument against its use."

Mrs. Ridley drew upon the arm of her husband. She did not like the tenor of this conversation, and wanted to get him away. But he was interested in what the clergyman was saying, and wished to hear what further he might adduce in favor of the health influence of pure wine.

"I have always used wine, and a little good brandy too, and am as free from any inordinate appetite as your most confirmed abstainer; but then I take especial care to have my liquor pure."

"A thing not easily done," said the clergyman, replying to their host.

"Not easy for every one, but yet possible. I have never found much difficulty."

"There will be less difficulty, I presume," returned Mr. Elliott, "when this country becomes, as it soon will, a large wine producing region. When cheap wines take the place of whisky, we will have a return to temperate habits among the lower classes, and not, I am satisfied, before. There is, and always has been, a craving in the human system for some kind of stimulus. After prolonged effort there is exhaustion and nervous languor that cannot always wait upon the restorative work of nutrition; indeed, the nutritive organs themselves often need stimulation before they can act with due vigor. Isn't that so, Dr. Hillhouse?"

And the clergyman addressed a handsome old man with hair almost as white as snow who stood listening to the conversation. He held a glass of wine in his hand.

"You speak with the precision of a trained pathologist," replied the person addressed, bowing gracefully and with considerable manner as he spoke. "I could not have said it better, Mr. Elliott."

The clergyman received the compliment with a pleased smile and bowed his acknowledgments, then remarked:

"You think as I do about the good effects that must follow a large product of American wines?"

Dr. Hillhouse gave a little shrug.

"Oh, then you don't agree with me?"

"Pure wine is one thing and too much of what is called American wine quite another thing," replied the doctor. "Cheap wine for the people, as matters now stand, is only another name for diluted alcohol. It is better than pure whisky, maybe, though the larger quantity that will naturally be taken must give the common dose of that article and work about the same effect in the end."

"Then you are not in favor of giving the people cheap wines?" said the clergyman.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders again.

"I have been twice to Europe," he replied, "and while there looked a little into the condition of the poorer classes in wine countries. I had been told that there was scarcely any intemperance among them, but I did not find it so. There, as here, the use of alcohol in any form, whether as beer, wine or whisky, produces the same result, varied in its effect upon the individual only by the peculiarity of temperament and national character of the people. I'll take another glass of that sherry; it's the best I've tasted for a year."

And Dr. Hillhouse held out his glass to be filled by the flattered host, Mr. Elliott doing the same, and physician and clergyman touched their brimming glasses and smiled and bowed "a good health." Before the hour for going home arrived both were freer of tongue and a little wilder in manner than when they came.

"The doctor is unusually brilliant to-night," said one, with just a slight lifting of the eyebrow.

"And so is Mr. Elliott," returned the person addressed, glancing at the clergyman, who, standing in the midst of a group of young men, glass in hand, was telling a story and laughing at his own witticisms.

"Nothing strait-laced about Mr. Elliott," remarked the other. "I like him for that. He doesn't think because he's a clergyman that he must always wear a solemn face and act as if he were conducting a funeral service. Just hear him laugh! It makes you feel good. You can get near to such a man. All the young people in his congregation like him because he doesn't expect them to come up to his official level, but is ever ready to come down to them and enter into their feelings and tastes."

"He likes a good glass of wine," said the first speaker.

"Of course he does. Have you any objection?"

"Shall I tell you what came into my thought just now?"

"Yes."

"What St. Paul said about eating meat."

"Oh!"

"If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.' And again: 'Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak.'"

"How does that apply to Mr. Elliott?"

"There are more than one or two young men in the group that surrounds him who need a better example than he is now setting. They need repression in the matter of wine-drinking, not encouragement—a good example of abstinence in their minister, and not enticement to drink through his exhibition of liberty. Do you think that I, church member though I am not, could stand as Mr. Elliott is now standing, glass in hand, gayly talking to young Ellis Whitford, who rarely goes to a party without—poor weak young man!—drinking too much, and so leading him on in the way of destruction instead of seeking in eager haste to draw him back? No sir! It is no light thing, as I regard it, to put a stumbling-block in another's way or to lead the weak or unwary into temptation."

"Perhaps you are right about it," was the answer, "and I must confess that, though not a temperance man myself, I never feel quite comfortable about it when I see clergymen taking wine freely at public dinners and private parties. It is not a good example, to say the least of it; and if there is a class of men in the community to whom we have some right to look for a good example, it is the class chosen and set apart to the work of saving human souls."

CHAPTER VI

MR. RIDLEY went home from that first party with his head as clear and his pulse as cool as when he came. The wine had not tempted him very strongly, though its odor had been fragrant to his nostrils, and the sparkle in the glasses pleasant to his sight. Appetite had not aroused itself nor put on its strength, but lay half asleep, waiting for some better opportunity, when the sentinels should be weaker or off their guard.

It had been much harder for him to refuse the invitation of his host than to deny the solicitations of the old desire. He had been in greater danger from pride than from appetite; and there remained with him a sense of being looked down upon and despised by the wealthy and eminent citizen who had honored him with an invitation, and who doubtless regarded his refusal to take wine with him as little less than a discourtesy. There were moments when he almost regretted that refusal. The wine which had been offered was of the purest quality, and he remembered but too well the theory advanced by Mr. Elliott, that the moderate use of pure wine would restore the normal taste and free a man whose appetite had been vitiated from its enslaving influence. His mind recurred to that thought very often, and the more he dwelt upon it, the more inclined he was to accept it as true. If it were indeed so, then he might be a man among men again.

Mr. Ridley did not feel as comfortable in his mind after as before this party, nor was he as strong as before. The enemy had found a door unguarded, had come in stealthily, and was lying on the alert, waiting for an opportunity.

A few weeks afterward came another invitation. It was accepted. Mrs. Ridley was not really well enough, to go out, but for her husband's sake she went with him, and by her presence and the quiet power she had over him held him back from the peril he might, standing alone, have tempted.

A month later, and cards of invitation were received from Mr. and Mrs. Spencer Birtwell. This was to be among the notable entertainments of the season. Mr. Birtwell was a wealthy banker who, like other men, had his weaknesses, one of which was a love of notoriety and display. He had a showy house and attractive equipages, and managed to get his name frequently chronicled in the newspapers, now as the leader in some public enterprise or charity, now as the possessor of some rare work of art, and now as the princely capitalists whose ability and sagacity had lifted him from obscurity to the proud position he occupied. He built himself a palace for a residence, and when it was completed and furnished issued tickets of admission, that the public might see in what splendor he was going to live. Of course the newspapers described everything with a minuteness of detail and a freedom of remark that made some modest and sensitive people fancy that Mr. Birtwell must be exceedingly annoyed. But he experienced no such feeling. Praise of any kind was pleasant to his ears; you could not give him too much, nor was he over-nice as to the quality. He lived in the eyes of his fellow-citizens, and in all his walk and conversation, he looked to their good opinion.

Such was Mr. Birtwell, at whose house a grand entertainment was to be given. Among the large number of invited guests were included Mr. and Mrs. Ridley. But it so happened that Mrs. Ridley could not go. A few days before the evening on which this party was to be given a new-born babe had been laid on her bosom.

"Good-night, dear, and God bless you!" Mr. Ridley had said, in a voice that was very tender, as he stooped over and kissed his wife. No wonder that all the light went out of her face the moment she was alone, nor that a shadow fell quickly over it, nor that from beneath the fringes of her shut eyelids tears crept slowly and rested upon her cheeks. If her husband had left her for the battlefield, she could not have felt a more dreadful impression of danger, nor have been oppressed by a more terrible fear for his safety. No wonder that her nurse, coming into the chamber a few minutes after Mr. Ridley went out, found her in a nervous chill.

The spacious and elegant drawing-rooms of Mr. and Mrs. Birtwell were crowded with the elite of the city, and the heart of the former swelled with pride as he received his guests and thought of their social, professional or political distinction, the lustre of which he felt to be, for the time, reflected upon himself. It was good to be in such company, and to feel that he was equal with the best. He had not always been the peer of such men. There had been an era of obscurity out of which he had slowly emerged, and therefore he had the larger pride and self-satisfaction in the position he now held.

Mrs. Birtwell was a woman of another order. All her life she had been used to the elegance that a wealthy parentage gave, and to which her husband had been, until within a few years, an entire stranger. She was "to the manner born," he a parvenu with a restless ambition to outshine. Familiarity with things luxurious and costly had lessened their value in her eyes, and true culture had lifted her above the weakness of resting in or caring much about them, while their newness and novelty to Mr. Birtwell made enjoyment keen, and led him on to extravagant and showy exhibitions of wealth that caused most people to smile at his weakness, and a good many to ask who he was and from whence he came that he carried himself so loftily. Mrs. Birtwell did not like the advanced position to which her husband carried her, but she yielded to his weak love of notoriety and social eclat as gracefully as possible, and did her best to cover his too glaring violations of good taste and conventional refinement. In this she was not always successful.

Of course the best of liquors in lavish abundance were provided by Mr. Birtwell for his guests. Besides the dozen different kinds of wine that were on the supper-table, there was a sideboard for gentlemen, in a room out of common observation, well stocked with brandy, gin and whisky, and it was a little curious to see how quickly this was discovered by certain of the guests, who scented it as truly as a bee scents honey in a clover-field, and extracted its sweets as eagerly.

Of the guests who were present we have now to deal chiefly with Mr. Ridley, and only incidentally with the rest. Dr. Hillhouse was there during the first part of the evening, but went away early—that, is, before twelve o'clock. He remained long enough, however, to do full justice to the supper and wines. His handsome and agreeable young associate, Dr. Angler, a slight acquaintance with whom the reader has already, prolonged his stay to a later hour.

The Rev. Dr. Elliott was also, among the guests, displaying his fine social qualities and attracting about him the young and the old. Everybody liked Dr. Elliott, he was so frank, so cordial, free and sympathetic, and, withal, so intelligent. He did not bring the clergyman with him into a gay drawing-room, nor the ascetic to a feast. He could talk with the banker about finance, with the merchant about trade, with the student or editor about science, literature and the current events of the day, and with young men and maidens about music and the lighter matters in which they happened to be interested. And, moreover, he could enjoy a good supper and knew the flavor of good wine. A man of such rare accomplishments came to be a general favorite, and so you encountered Mr. Elliott at nearly all the fashionable parties.

Mr. Ridley had met the reverend doctor twice, and had been much pleased with him. What he had heard him say about the healthy or rather saving influences of pure wine had taken a strong hold of his thoughts, and he had often wished for an opportunity to talk with him about it. On this evening he found that opportunity. Soon after his arrival at the house of Mr. Birtwell he saw Mr. Elliott in one of the parlors, and made his way into the little group which had already gathered around the affable clergyman. Joining in the conversation, which was upon some topic of the day, Mr. Ridley, who talked well, was not long in awakening that interest in the mind of Mr. Elliott which one cultivated and intelligent person naturally feels for another; and in a little while, they had the conversation pretty much to themselves. It touched this theme and that, and finally drifted in a direction which enabled Mr. Ridley to refer to what he had heard Mr. Elliott say about the healthy effect of pure wine on the taste of men whose appetites had become morbid, and to ask him if he had any good ground for his belief.

"I do not know that I can bring any proof of my theory," returned Mr. Elliott, "but I hold to it on the ground of an eternal fitness of things. Wine is good, and was given by God to make glad the hearts of men, and is to be used temperately, as are all other gifts. It may be abused, and is abused daily. Men hurt themselves by excess of wine as by excess of food. But the abuse of a thing is no argument against its use. If a man through epicurism or gormandizing has brought on disease, what do you do with him? Deny him all food, or give him of the best in such quantities as his nutritive system can appropriate and change into healthy muscle, nerve and bone? You do the latter, of course, and so would I treat the case of a man who had hurt himself by excess of wine. I would see that he had only the purest and in diminished quantity, so that his deranged system might not only have time but help in regaining its normal condition."

"And you think this could be safely done?" said Mr. Ridley.

"That is my view of the case."

"Then you do not hold to the entire abstinence theory?"

"No, sir; on that subject our temperance people have run into what we might call fanaticism, and greatly weakened their influence. Men should be taught self-control and moderation in the use of things. If the appetite becomes vitiated through over-indulgence, you do not change its condition by complete denial. What you want for radical cure is the restoration of the old ability to use without abusing. In other words, you want a man made right again as to his rational power of self-control, by which he becomes master of himself in all the degrees of his life, from the highest to the lowest."

"All very well," remarked Dr. Hillhouse, who had joined them while Mr. Elliott was speaking. "But, in my experience, the rational self-control of which you speak is one of the rarest things to be met with in common life, and it may be fair to conclude that the man who cannot exercise it before a dangerous habit has been formed will not be very likely to exercise it afterward when anything is done to favor that habit. Habits, Mr. Elliott, are dreadful hard things to manage, and I do not know a harder one to deal with than the habit of over-indulgence in wine or spirits. I should be seriously afraid of your prescription. The temperate use of wine I hold to be good; but for those who have once lost the power of controlling their appetites I am clear in my opinion there is only one way of safety, and that is the way of entire abstinence from any drink in which there is alcohol, call it by what name you will; and this is the view now held by the most experienced and intelligent men, in our profession."

A movement in the company being observed, Mr. Elliott, instead of replying, stepped toward a lady, and asked the pleasure of escorting her to the supper-room. Dr. Hillhouse was equally courteous, and Mr. Ridley, seeing the wife of General Logan, whom he had often met in Washington, standing a little way off, passed to her side and offered his arm, which was accepted.

There was a crowd and crush upon the stairs, fine gentlemen and ladies seeming to forget their courtesy and good breeding in their haste to be among the earliest who should reach the banqueting-hall. This was long and spacious, having been planned by Mr. Birtwell with a view to grand entertainments like the one he was now giving. In an almost incredibly short space of time it was filled to suffocation. Those who thought themselves among the first to move were surprised to find the tables already surrounded by young men and women, who had been more interested in the status of the supper-room than in the social enjoyments of the parlors, and who had improved their advanced state of observation by securing precedence of the rest, and stood waiting for the signal to begin.

Mr. Birtwell had a high respect for the Church, and on an occasion like this could do no less than honor one of its dignitaries by requesting him to ask a blessing on the sumptuous repast he had provided—on the rich food and the good wine and brandy he was about dispensing with such a liberal hand. So, in the waiting pause that ensued after the room was well filled, Mr. Elliott was called upon to bless this feast, which he did in a raised, impressive and finely modulated voice. Then came the rattle of plates and the clink of glasses, followed by the popping of champagne and the multitudinous and distracting Babel of tongues.

Mr. Ridley, who felt much inclined to favor the superficial and ill-advised utterances of Mr. Elliott, took scarcely any heed of what Dr. Hillhouse had replied. In fact, knowing that the doctor was free with wine himself, he did not give much weight to what he said, feeling that he was talking more for argument's sake than to express his real sentiments.

A feeling of repression came over Mr. Ridley as he entered the supper-room and his eyes ran down the table. Half of this sumptuous feast was forbidden enjoyment. He must not taste the wine. All were free but him. He could fill a glass for the elegant lady whose hand was still upon his arm, but must not pledge her back except in water. A sense of shame and humiliation crept into his heart. So he felt when, in the stillness that fell upon the company, the voice of Mr. Elliott rose in blessing on the good things now spread for them in such lavish profusion. Only one sentence took hold on Mr. Ridley's mind. It was this: "Giver of all natural as well as spiritual good things, of the corn and the wine equally with the bread and the water of life, sanctify these bounties that come from thy beneficent hand, and keep us from any inordinate or hurtful use thereof."

Mr. Ridley drew a deeper breath. A load seemed taken from his bosom. He felt a sense of freedom and safety. If the wine were pure, it was a good gift of God, and could not really do him harm. A priest, claiming to stand as God's representative among men, had invoked a blessing on this juice of the grape, and given it by this act a healthier potency. All this crowded upon him, stifling reason and experience and hushing the voice of prudence.

And now, alas! he was as a feather on the surface of a wind-struck lake, and given up to the spirit and pressure of the hour. The dangerous fallacy to which Mr. Elliott had given utterance held his thoughts to the exclusion of all other considerations. A clear path out of the dreary wilderness in which he had been, straying seemed to open before him, and he resolved to walk therein. Fatal delusion!

As soon as Mr. Ridley had supplied Mrs. General Locran with terrapin and oysters and filled a plate for himself, he poured out two glasses of wine and handed one of them to the lady, then, lifting the other, he bowed a compliment and placed it to his lips. The lady smiled on him graciously, sipping the wine and praising its flavor.

"Pure as nectar," was the mental response of Mr. Ridley as the long-denied palate felt the first thrill of sweet satisfaction. He had taken a single mouthful, but another hand seemed to grasp the one that held the cup of wine and press it back to his lips, from which it was not removed until empty.

The prescription of Mr. Elliott failed. Either the wine was not pure or his theory was at fault. It was but little over an hour from the fatal moment when Mr. Ridley put a glass of wine to his lips ere he went out alone into the storm of a long-to-be-remembered night in a state of almost helpless intoxication, and staggered off in the blinding snow that soon covered his garments like a winding sheet.

CHAPTER VII

THE nurse of Mrs. Ridley had found her in a nervous chill, at which she was greatly troubled. More clothing was laid upon the bed, and bottles of hot water placed to her feet. To all this Mrs. Ridley made no objection—remained, in fact, entirely passive and irresponsive, like one in a partial stupor, from which she did not, to all appearance, rally even after the chill had subsided.

She lay with her eyes shut, her lips pressed together and her forehead drawn into lines, and an expression of pain on her face, answering only in dull monosyllables to the inquiries made every now and then by her nurse, who hovered about the bed and watched over her with anxious solicitude.

As she feared, fever symptoms began to show themselves. The evening had worn away, and it was past ten o'clock. It would not do to wait until morning in a case like this, and so a servant was sent to the office of Dr. Hillhouse, with a request that he would come immediately. She returned saying that the doctor was not at home.

Mrs. Ridley lay with her eyes shut, but the nurse knew by the expression of her face that she was not asleep. The paleness of her countenance had given way to a fever hue, and she noticed occasional restless movements of the hands, twitches of the eyelids and nervous starts. To her questions the patient gave no satisfactory answers.

An hour elapsed, and still the doctor did not make his appearance. The servant was called and questioned. She was positive about having left word for the doctor to come immediately on returning home.

"Is that snow?" inquired Mrs. Ridley, starting up in bed and listening. The wind had risen suddenly and swept in a gusty dash against the windows, rattling on the glass the fine hard grains which had been falling for some time.

She remained leaning on her arm and listening for some moments, while an almost frightened look came into her face.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"After eleven o'clock," replied the nurse.

All at once the storm seemed to have awakened into a wild fury. More loudly it rushed and roared and dashed its sand-like snow against the windows of Mrs. Ridley's chamber. The sick woman shivered and the fever-flush died out of her face.

"You must lie down!" said the nurse, speaking with decision and putting her hands on Mrs. Ridley to press her back. But the latter resisted.

"Indeed, indeed, ma'am," urged the nurse, showing great anxiety, "you must lie down and keep covered up in bed. It might be the death of you."

"Oh, that's awful!" exclaimed Mrs. Ridley as the wind went howling by and the snow came in heavier gusts against the windows. "Past eleven, did you say?"

"Yes, ma'am, and the doctor ought to have been here long ago. I wonder why he doesn't come?"

"Hark! wasn't that our bell?" cried Mrs. Ridley, bending forward in a listening attitude.

The nurse opened the chamber door and stood hearkening for a moment or two. Not hearing the servant stir, she ran quickly down stairs to the street door and drew it open, but found no one.

There was a look of suspense and fear in Mrs. Ridley's face when the nurse came back:

"Who was it?"

"No one," replied the nurse. "The wind deceived you."

A groan came from Mrs. Ridley's lips as she sank down upon the bed, where, with her face hidden, she lay as still as if sleeping. She did not move nor speak for the space of more than half an hour, and all the while her nurse waited and listened through the weird, incessant noises of the storm for the coming of Dr. Hillhouse, but waited and listened in vain.

All at once, as if transferred to within a few hundred rods of these anxious watchers, the great clock of the city, which in the still hours of a calm night could be heard ringing out clear but afar off, threw a resonant clang upon the air, pealing the first stroke of the hour of twelve. Mrs. Ridley started up in bed with a scared look on her face. Away the sound rolled, borne by the impetuous wind-wave that had caught it up as the old bell shivered it off, and carried it away so swiftly that it seemed to die almost in the moment it was born. The listeners waited, holding their breaths. Then, swept from the course this first peal had taken, the second came to their ears after a long interval muffled and from a distance, followed almost instantly by the third, which went booming past them louder than the first. And so, with strange intervals and variations of time and sound as the wind dashed wildly onward or broke and swerved from its course, the noon of night was struck, and the silence that for a brief time succeeded left a feeling of awe upon the hearts of these lonely women.

To the ears of another had come these strange and solemn tones, struck out at midnight away up in the clear rush of the tempest, and swept away in a kind of mad sport, and tossed about in the murky sky. To the ears of another, who, struggling and battling with the storm, had made his way with something of a blind instinct to within a short distance of his home, every stroke of the clock seemed to come from a different quarter; and when the last peal rang out, it left him in helpless bewilderment. When he staggered on again, it was in a direction opposite to that in which he had been going. For ten minutes he wrought with the blinding and suffocating snow, which, turn as he would, the wind kept dashing into his face, and then his failing limbs gave out and he sunk benumbed with cold upon the pavement. Half buried in the snow, he was discovered soon afterward and carried to a police station, where he found himself next morning in one of the cells, a wretched, humiliated, despairing man.

"Why, Mr. Ridley! It can't be possible!" It was the exclamation of the police magistrate when this man was brought, soon after daylight, before him.

Ridley stood dumb in presence of the officer, who was touched by the helpless misery of his face.

"You were at Mr. Birtwell's?"

Ridley answered by a silent inclination of his head.

"I do not wonder," said the magistrate, his voice softening, "that, you lost your way in the storm last night. You are not the only one who found himself astray and at fault. Our men had to take care of quite a number of Mr. Birtwell's guests. But I will not detain you, Mr. Ridley. I am sorry this has happened. You must be more careful in future."

With slow steps and bowed head Mr. Ridley left the station-house and took his way homeward. How could he meet his wife? What of her? How had she passed the night? Vividly came up the parting scene as she lay with her babe, only a few days old, close against her bosom, her tender eyes, in which he saw shadows of fear, fixed lovingly upon his face.

He had promised to be home soon, and had said a fervent "God bless you!" as he left a kiss warm upon her lips.

And now! He stood still, a groan breaking on the air. Go home! How could he look into the face of his wife again? She had walked with him through the valley of humiliation in sorrow and suffering and shame for years, and now, after going up from this valley and bearing her to a pleasant land of hope and happiness, he had plunged down madly. Then a sudden fear smote his heart. She was in no condition to bear a shock such as his absence all night must have caused. The consequences might be fatal. He started forward at a rapid pace, hurrying along until he came in sight of his house. A carriage stood at the door. What could this mean?

Entering, he was halfway up stairs when, the nurse met him.

"Oh, Mr. Ridley," she exclaimed, "why did you stay away all night? Mrs. Ridley has been so ill, and I couldn't get the doctor. Oh, sir, I don't know what will come of it. She's in a dreadful way—out of her head. I sent for Dr. Hillhouse last night, but he didn't come."

She spoke in a rapid manner, showing much alarm and agitation.

"Is Dr. Hillhouse here now?" asked Mr. Ridley, trying to repress his feelings.

"No, sir. He sent Dr. Angier, but I don't trust much in him. Dr. Hillhouse ought to see her right away. But you do look awful, sir!"

The nurse fixed her eyes upon him in a half-wondering stare.

Mr. Ridley broke from her, and passing up the stairs in two or three long strides, made his way to the bath-room, where in a few moments he changed as best he could his disordered appearance, and then hurried to his wife's chamber.

A wild cry of joy broke from her lips as she saw him enter; but when he came near, she put up her hands and shrunk away from him, saying in a voice that fairly wailed, it was so full of disappointment:

"I thought it was Ralph—my dear, good Ralph! Why don't he come home?"

Her cheeks were red with fever and her eyes bright and shining. She had started up in bed on hearing her husband's step, but now shrunk down under the clothing and turned her face away.

"Blanche! Blanche!" Mr. Ridley called the name of his wife tenderly as he stood leaning over her.

Moving her head slowly, like one in doubt, she looked at him in a curious, questioning way. Then, closing her eyes, she turned her face from him again.

"Blanche! Blanche!" For all the response that came, Mr. Ridley might as well have spoken to deaf ears. Dr. Angier laid his hand on his arm and drew him away:

"She must have as little to disturb her as possible, Mr. Ridley. The case is serious."

"Where is Dr. Hillhouse? Why did not he come?" demanded Mr. Ridley.

"He will be here after a while. It is too early for him," replied Dr. Angier.

"He must come now. Go for him at once, doctor."

"If you say so," returned Doctor Angier, with some coldness of manner; "but I cannot tell how soon he will be here. He does not go out until after eight or nine o'clock, and there are two or three pressing cases besides this."

"I will go," said Mr. Ridley. "Don't think me rude or uncourteous, Dr. Angier. I am like one distracted. Stay here until I get back. I will bring Dr. Hillhouse."

"Take my carriage—it is at the door; and say to Dr. Hillhouse from me that I would like him to come immediately," Dr. Angier replied to this.

Mr. Ridley ran down stairs, and springing into the carriage, ordered the driver to return with all possible speed to the office. Dr. Hillhouse was in bed, but rose on getting the summons from Dr. Angier and accompanied Mr. Ridley. He did not feel in a pleasant humor. The night's indulgence in wine and other allurements of the table had not left his head clear nor his nerves steady for the morning. A sense of physical discomfort made him impatient and irritable. At first all the conditions of this case were not clear to him; but as his thought went back to the incidents of the night, and he remembered not only seeing Mr. Ridley in considerable excitement from drink, but hearing it remarked upon by one or two persons who were familiar with his life at Washington, the truth dawned upon his mind, and he said abruptly, with considerable sternness of manner and in a quick voice:

"At what time did you get home last night?"

Ridley made no reply.

"Or this morning? It was nearly midnight when *I* left, and you were still there, and, I am sorry to say, not in the best condition for meeting a sick wife at home. If there is anything seriously wrong in this case, the responsibility lies, I am afraid, at your door, sir."

They were in the carriage, moving rapidly. Mr. Ridley sat with his head drawn down and bent a little forward; not answering, Dr. Hillhouse said no more. On arriving at Mr. Ridley's residence, he met Dr. Angier, with whom he held a brief conference before seeing his patient. He found her in no favorable condition. The fever was not so intense as Dr. Angier had found it on his arrival, but its effect on the brain was more marked.

"Too much time has been lost." Dr. Hillhouse spoke aside to his assistant as they sat together watching carefully every symptom of their patient.

"I sent for you before ten o'clock last night," said the nurse, who overheard the remark and wished to screen herself from any blame.

Dr. Hillhouse did not reply.

"I knew there was danger," pursued the nurse. "Oh, doctor, if you had only come when I sent for you! I waited and waited until after midnight."

The doctor growled an impatient response, but so muttered and mumbled the words that the nurse could not make them out. Mr. Ridley was in the room, standing with folded arms a little way from the bed, stern and haggard, with wild, congested eyes and closely shut mouth, a picture of anguish, fear and remorse.

The two physicians remained with Mrs. Ridley for over twenty minutes before deciding on their line of treatment. A prescription was then made, and careful instructions given to the nurse.

"I will call again in the course of two or three hours," said Dr. Hillhouse, on going away. "Should any thing unfavorable occur, send to the office immediately."

"Doctor!" Mr. Ridley laid his hand on the arm of Dr. Hillhouse. "What of my wife?" There was a frightened look in his pale, agitated face. His voice shook.

"She is in danger," replied the doctor.

"But you know what to do? You can control the disease? You have had such cases before?"

"I will do my best," answered the doctor, trying to move on; but Mr. Ridley clutched his arm tightly and held him fast:

"Is it—is it—puer-p-p—" His voice shook so that he could not articulate the word that was on his tongue.

"I am afraid so," returned the doctor.

A deep groan broke from the lips of Mr. Ridley. His hand dropped from the arm of Dr. Hillhouse and he stood trembling from head to foot, then cried out in a voice of unutterable despair:

"From heaven down to hell in one wild leap! God help me!"

Dr. Hillhouse was deeply moved at this. He had felt stern and angry, ready each moment to accuse and condemn, but the intense emotion displayed by the husband shocked, subdued and changed his tone of feeling.

"You must calm, yourself, my dear sir," he said. "The case looks bad, but I have seen recovery in worse cases than this. We will do our best. But remember that you have duties and responsibilities that must not fail."

"Whatsoever in me lies, doctor," answered Mr. Ridley, with a sudden calmness that seemed supernatural, "you may count on my doing. If she dies, I am lost." There was a deep solemnity in his tones as he uttered this last sentence. "You see, sir," he added, "what I have at stake."

"Just for the present little more can be done than to follow the prescriptions we have given and watch their effect on the patient," returned Dr. Hillhouse. "If any change occurs, favorable or unfavorable, let us know. If your presence in her room should excite or disturb her in any way, you must prudently abstain from going near her."

The two physicians went away with but little hope in their hearts for the sick woman. Whatever the exciting cause or causes might have been, the disease which had taken hold of her with unusual violence presented already so fatal a type that the issue was very doubtful.

CHAPTER VIII

"IT is too late, I am afraid," said Dr. Hillhouse as the two physicians rode away, "The case ought to have been seen last night. I noticed the call when I came home from Mr. Birtwell's, but the storm was frightful, and I did not feel like going out again. In fact, if the truth must be told, I hardly gave the matter a thought. I saw the call, but its importance did not occur to me. Late hours, suppers and wine do not always leave the head as clear as it should be."

"I do not like the looks of things," returned Dr. Angier. "All the symptoms are bad."

"Yes, very bad. I saw Mrs. Ridley yesterday morning, and found her doing well. No sign of fever or any functional disturbance. She must have had some shock or exposure to cold."

"Her husband was out all night. I learned that much from the nurse," replied Dr. Angier. "When the storm became violent, which was soon after ten o'clock, she grew restless and disturbed, starting up and listening as the snow dashed on the windowpanes and the wind roared angrily. 'I could not keep her down,' said the nurse. 'She would spring up in bed, throw off the clothes and sit listening, with a look of anxiety and dread on her face. The wind came in through every chink and crevice, chilling the room in spite of all I could do to keep it warm. I soon saw, from the color that began coming into her face and from the brightness in her eyes, that fever had set in. I was alarmed, and sent for the doctor.'"

"And did this go on all night?" asked Dr. Hillhouse.

"Yes. She never closed her eyes except in intervals of feverish stupor, from which she would start up and cry out for her husband, who was, she imagined, in some dreadful peril."

"Bad! bad!" muttered Dr. Hillhouse. "There'll be a death, I fear, laid at Mr. Birtwell's door."

"I don't understand you," said his companion, in a tone of surprise.

"Mr. Ridley, as I have been informed," returned Dr. Hillhouse, "has been an intemperate man. After falling very low, he made an earnest effort to reform, and so far got the mastery of his appetite as to hold it in subjection. Such men are always in danger, as you and I very well know. In nine cases out of ten—or, I might say, in ninety-nine cases in a hundred—to taste again is to fall. It is like cutting the chain that holds a wild beast. The bound but not dead appetite springs into full vigor again, and surprised resolution is beaten down and conquered. To invite such a man to, an entertainment where wines and liquors are freely dispensed is to put a human soul in peril."

"Mr. Birtwell may not have known anything about him," replied Dr. Angier.

"All very true. But there is one thing he did know."

"What?"

"That he could not invite a company of three hundred men and women to his house, though he selected them from the most refined and intelligent circles in our city, and give them intoxicating drinks as freely as he did last night, without serious harm. In such company there will be some, like Mr. Ridley, to whom the cup of wine offered in hospitality will be a cup of cursing. Good resolutions will be snapped like thread in a candle-flame, and men who came sober will go away, as from any other drinking-saloon, drunk, as he went out last night."

"Drinking-saloon! You surprise me, doctor."

"I feel bitter this morning; and when the bitterness prevails, I am apt to call things by strong names. Yes, I say drinking-saloon, Doctor Angier. What matters it in the dispensation whether you give away or sell the liquor, whether it be done over a bar or set out free to every guest in a merchant's elegant banqueting-room? The one is as much a liquor-saloon as the other. Men go away from one, as from the other, with heads confused and steps unsteady and good resolutions wrecked by indulgence. Knowing that such things must follow; that from every fashionable entertainment some men, and women too, go away weaker and in more danger than when they came; that boys and young men are tempted to drink and the feet of some set in the ways of ruin; that health is injured and latent diseases

quicken into force; that evil rather than good flows from them,—knowing all this, I say, can any man who so turns his house, for a single evening, into a drinking-saloon—I harp on the words, you see, for I am feeling bitter—escape responsibility? No man goes blindly in this way."

"Taking your view of the case," replied Dr. Angier, "there may be another death laid at the door of Mr. Birtwell."

"Whose?" Dr. Hillhouse turned quickly to his assistant. They had reached home, and were standing in their office.

"Nothing has been heard of Archie Voss since he left Mr. Birtwell's last night, and his poor mother is lying insensible, broken down by her fears."

"Oh, what of her? I was called for in the night, and you went in my place."

"I found Mrs. Voss in a state of coma, from which she had only partially recovered when I left at daylight. Mr. Voss is in great anxiety about his son, who has never stayed away all night before, except with the knowledge of his parents."

"Oh, that will all come right," said Dr. Hillhouse. "The young man went home, probably, with some friend. Had too much to drink, it may be, and wanted to sleep it off before coming into his mother's presence."

"There is no doubt about his having drunk too much," returned Dr. Angier. "I saw him going along the hall toward the street door in rather a bad way. He had his overcoat on and his hat in his hand."

"Was any one with him?"

"I believe not. I think he went out alone."

"Into that dreadful storm?"

"Yes."

The countenance of Dr. Hillhouse became very grave:

"And has not been heard of since?"

"No."

"Have the police been informed about it?"

"Yes. The police have had the matter in hand for several hours, but at the time I left not the smallest clue had been found."

"Rather a bad look," said Dr. Hillhouse. "What does Mr. Voss say about it?"

"His mind seems to dwell on two theories—one that Archie, who had a valuable diamond pin and a gold watch, may have wandered into some evil neighborhood, bewildered by the storm, and there been set upon and robbed—murdered perhaps. The other is that he has fallen in some out-of-the-way place, overcome by the cold, and lies buried in the snow. The fact that no police-officer reports having seen him or any one answering to his description during the night awakens the gravest fears."

"Still," replied Dr. Hillhouse, "it may all come out right. He may have gone to a hotel. There are a dozen theories to set against those of his friends."

After remaining silent for several moments, he said:

"The boy had been drinking too much?"

"Yes; and I judge from, his manner, when I saw him on his way to the street, that he was conscious of his condition and ashamed of it. He went quietly along, evidently trying not to excite observation, but his steps were unsteady and his sight not true, for in trying to thread his way along the hall he ran against one and another, and drew the attention he was seeking to avoid."

"Poor fellow!" said Dr. Hillhouse, with genuine pity. "He was always a nice boy. If anything has happened to him, I wouldn't give a dime for the life of his mother."

"Nor I. And even as it is, the shock already received may prove greater than her exhausted system can bear. I think you had better see her, doctor, as early as possible."

"There were no especially bad symptoms when you left, beyond the state of partial coma?"

"No. Her respiration had become easy, and she presented the appearance of one in a quiet sleep."

"Nature is doing all for her that can be done," returned Dr. Hillhouse. "I will see her as early as practicable. It's unfortunate that we have these two cases on our hands just at this time, and most unfortunate of all that I should have been compelled to go out so early this morning. That doesn't look right."

And the doctor held up his hand, which showed a nervous unsteadiness.

"It will pass off after you have taken breakfast."

"I hope so. Confound these parties! I should not have gone last night, and if I'd given the matter due consideration would have remained at home."

"Why so?"

"You know what that means as well as I do;" and Dr. Hillhouse held up his tremulous hand again. "We can't take wine freely late at night and have our nerves in good order next morning. A life may depend on a steady hand to-day."

"It will all pass off at breakfast-time. Your good cup of coffee will make everything all right."

"Perhaps yea, perhaps nay," was answered. "I forgot myself last night, and accepted too many wine compliments. It was first this one and then that one, until, strong as my head is, I got more into it than should have gone there. We are apt to forget ourselves on these occasions. If I had only taken a glass or two, it would have made little difference. But my system was stimulated beyond its wont, and, I fear, will not be in the right tone to-day."

"You will have to bring it up, then, doctor," said the assistant. "To touch that work with an unsteady hand might be death."

"A glass or two of wine will do it; but when I operate, I always prefer to have my head clear. Stimulated nerves are not to be depended upon, and the brain that has wine in it is never a sure guide. A surgeon must see at the point of his instrument; and if there be a mote or any obscurity in his mental vision, his hand, instead of working a cure, may bring disaster."

"You operate at twelve?"

"Yes."

"You will be all right enough by that time; but it will not do to visit many patients. I am sorry about this case of child-bed fever; but I will see it again immediately after breakfast, and report."

While they were still talking the bell rang violently, and in a few moments Mr. Ridley came dashing into the office. His face wore a look of the deepest distress.

"Oh, doctor, he exclaimed can't you do something for my wife? She'll die if you don't. Oh, do go to her again!"

"Has any change taken place since we left?" asked Dr. Hillhouse, with a professional calmness it required some effort to assume.

"She is in great distress, moaning and sobbing and crying out as if in dreadful pain, and she doesn't know anything you say to her."

The two physicians looked at each other with sober faces.

"You'd better see her again," said Dr. Hillhouse, speaking to his assistant.

"No, no, no, Dr. Hillhouse! You must see her yourself. It is a case of life and death!" cried out the distracted husband. "The responsibility is yours, and I must and will hold you to that responsibility. I placed my wife in your charge, not in that of this or any other man."

Mr. Ridley was beside himself with fear. At first Dr. Hillhouse felt like resenting this assault, but he controlled himself.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Ridley," he answered in a repressed voice. "We do not help things by passion or intemperance of language. I saw your wife less than half an hour ago, and after giving the utmost care to the examination of her case made the best prescription in my power. There has not been time for the medicines to act yet. I know how troubled you must feel, and can pardon your

not very courteous bearing; but there are some things that can and some things that cannot be done. There are good reasons why it will not be right for me to return to your house now—reasons affecting the safety, it may be the life, of another, while my not going back with you can make no difference to Mrs. Ridley. Dr. Angier is fully competent to report on her condition, and I can decide on any change of treatment that may be required as certainly as if I saw her myself. Should he find any change for the worse, I will consider it my duty to see her without delay."

"Don't neglect her, for God's sake, doctor!" answered Mr. Ridley, in a pleading voice. His manner had grown subdued. "Forgive my seeming discourtesy. I am wellnigh distracted. If I lose her, I lose my hold on everything. Oh, doctor, you cannot know how much is at stake. God help me if she dies!"

"My dear sir, nothing in our power to do shall be neglected. Dr. Angier will go back with you; and if, on his return, I am satisfied that there is a change for the worse, I will see your wife without a moment's delay. And in the mean time, if you wish to call in another physician, I shall be glad to have you do so. Fix the time for consultation at any hour before half-past ten o'clock, and I will meet him. After that I shall be engaged professionally for two or three hours."

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