THE CURSE AND THE CUP

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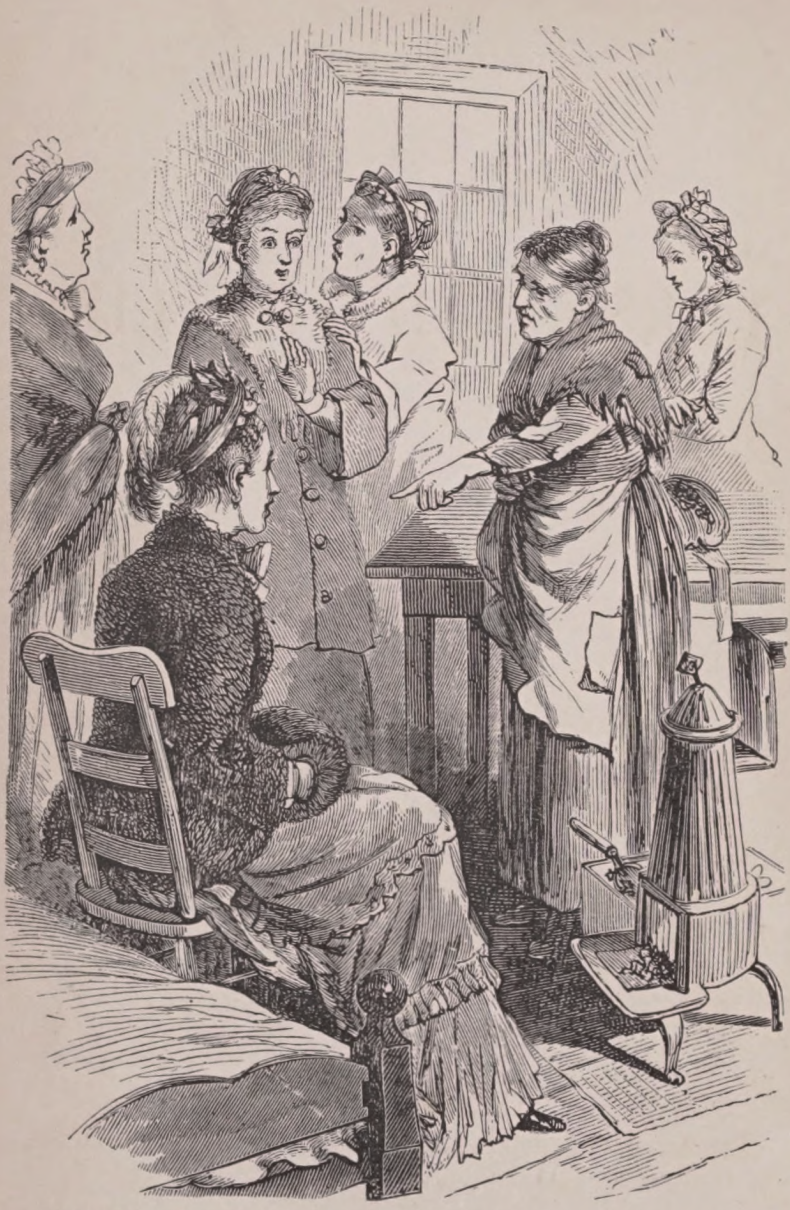

"YOUR HUSBAND IS A HOTEL-KEEPER," ETC., ETC.

[FRONTISPIECE.]

THE

CURSE AND THE CUP.

BY

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THE CURSE AND THE CUP.

A TRUE TALE.

IT was half-past nine on a May evening, when a girl of eighteen ran up into her bed-room, and shut the door with a bang which expressed that she was thoroughly out of temper. The room was the upper one of a small cottage, and had low, sloping ceilings; two beds were in it, and a tallow candle burned dimly on the table. Patty Grey went up to one of the beds and looked

lovingly at its occupants, a boy of nine, and one of four; she took the baby's thumb out of his mouth, smoothed the quilt, and then went to the other bed where slept a girl of six. She was sitting on the edge of this bed, looking gloomily at the floor, when some one came up the narrow stair, vainly tried the bolted door, and called—"Come down, Patty, I tell you! Here's good company; they'll say I'm a bad step-mother, keeping a grown-up girl like you out of sight!"

"Go away! I won't come down," replied Patty; but now she was sorry as well as angry.

A heavier step came up the stair, and the door shook under the blow of a big

fist. Another voice cried "Coom down, gurl! Wull ye coom down, an' sing us a song? a purty gurl like yo, Patty, has na right to hide hersen." Patty began to look terrified as she heard the last speaker say: "Sten' awa,' an I burst the door in a wee."

"Go away!" cried Patty, springing up. "If you touch my door, I'll call the police, and the neighbors; don't you dare!"

"Come down!" said the woman outside, to her companion. "Patty's cross; she's mostly cross now-a-days; oh, dear me!"

Meanwhile Patty opened a closet and took out two clean sheets which were there for changing the two beds; she

knotted these together, and going to her window looked down into the back-yard, dimly discernible in the starlight. Then she tied the corner of one sheet fast to the post of her little brother's bed, which stood by the window, threw both sheets out, sat on the window-sill, and, taking the muslin firmly in her hands, let herself down to the ground. Then she ran swiftly around the house, and down the street for half a block, and without ceremony of knocking, burst into a neighbor's dwelling. An elderly lady was sewing by a round table; Patty dropped on the floor, laid her face on the lady's lap, and broke into hearty crying, unable for the moment, to speak.

"Patty, my child," said the lady, "what is wrong now?"

"Everything is wrong, and all is worse and worse. It is of no use to try and make things better. They are all drinking again, and our front room is like a bar-room. They are smoking, drinking and jabbering. Kate Kidd, who was in jail last week for being drunk and disorderly, and big Alec Tooms, tearing up stairs after me, and threatening to break my door in if I didn't come sing for them!"

"This thing can not go on, Patty," said the lady, firmly. "You have stood by your step-mother, and as long as there is any reason in it. You

owe something to your own mother's memory; besides, in trying to save this woman who is determined to throw herself away, you are risking the ruin of her children. That house is no place for them; such sights will make little Ben a drunkard, and destroy the self-respect of Tottie. I often think it is my duty to ask the town authorities to intervene before you are all ruined, or burnt up in your beds. You can not protect those children; you can not even protect yourself. You have again and again been offered a home by your aunts in Rutland, and now you really must accept it."

"But," said Patty, "those aunts are *my* mother's sisters, and they are no

relation to these three children, and I know they will not take them with me. In fact, they are not very rich, and they will blame the children for being the children of such a mother. You see, Mrs. Neville, that my aunts will never be able to understand how nice and good my poor step-mother was when my father married her, and they are angry at such a woman being in my mother's place. Then, too, they are very angry at the way that my father made his will, and how our little money has been wasted."

"But what will you do? You must escape from this somehow."

"My father has relations in Portland, Maine. I remember an Uncle Dick, and

an Aunt Martha, that he used to speak of. They are related to the children as much as to me, and perhaps they will do something for them, if they are not too poor. Some one wrote them a letter when father died, four years and over ago, and told him that mother was well, and we were left comfortable, and I think she got a letter after that. I'll write to them."

"Very well; you'll have to write to some of them this very night," said Mrs. Neville, decidedly, putting by her work and going for a writing-desk, "for if I am silent and let things go on as they have for six months past, I shall forever blame myself if anything terrible occurs at your house."

Patty dried her eyes, composed herself, and sitting by the table wrote this letter:

"My dear Uncle Dick: I am ashamed and sorry to tell you that since my father's death my poor step-mother has become a confirmed drunkard. I have stayed with her and tried to get her to do better, but all seems useless, and I am afraid to stay here any longer. I could get places to live, and my mother's sisters would also give me a home, but I can not be parted from my little step-sister and brothers; for four years they have had no mother but me. You are their uncle as well as mine, and I thought you might be able to make some plan

for us to keep together. I am willing to work very hard for the children; they are such nice, dear little things, and their mother was very, very kind to me before she took to drink. I must tell you, too, that nearly all the property our father left has been wasted, and we children have nothing.

"Your affectionate neice,

"PATTY GREY."

Mrs. Neville promised to post this letter, and privately made up her mind to write one to the same address, telling this Uncle Dick what a brave and good girl his neice Patty was, and how for four years she had been a mother to the children, and had kept the little home in

order in spite of the disadvantage of her mother's drunken ways. She told him, also, that Patty was a very pretty and well-mannered girl, but now it was no longer safe for her to live in such a riotous home, where thieves and drunkards were brought for company.

Indeed, when Patty was lying asleep on the lounge in the early morning, Mrs. Neville wrote just such a letter as she had planned during a wakeful night, and gave both epistles to a neighbor who was going early to market, and would post them. As she came in after giving up these letters, Patty woke, looked around, and recovered herself enough to remember her last night's adventure.

"I must go home," said Patty.

"It is early yet," said Mrs. Neville; "wait and have some breakfast."

"No, indeed, thank you," said Patty. "I know just how things will be at our home. Foul air, broken cups and glasses, beer and whisky spilled around, pipe-ashes on the floor, mother asleep, very likely on the floor, too. I never let the children see such things. I get things all cleaned up, and mother in bed, the house aired, and breakfast ready before I let them come down; I don't want them demoralized by such sights, and I don't like them to remember such ugly scenes from their childhood. When I was their age, things were nice."

"But how will you get in?" asked Mrs. Neville.

"Oh," sighed Patty, "easy enough; no one will have taken thought to lock the house; it will all be open."

"And suppose some of that poor thing's friends are there drunk, too. What will you do?"

"Just what I've done before," said Patty, looking very firm. "I shall step to the corner to our policeman's house, and have him come drag them off."

"Well, God go with you and protect you," said Mrs. Neville. "And Patty, see here, I have set twice as many cakes as I need for breakfast, and I wish you would take a pitcher of the batter home with

you for the children; and here are a dozen fresh eggs. My hens lay so many that I do not know what to do with them."

"Ah," said Patty, "I see how it is; you just want to save me trouble, and the only way I can thank you is to come back here, when anything goes wrong with me."

Carrying the pitcher, and the basket of eggs, Patty set off for home. It was so early that scarcely any one was in the street, and the girl found, as she expected, the door of her home standing open, her step-mother asleep on the floor, and the little sitting-room and kitchen giving signs of a drunken carousal.

The comfortable little cottage had three rooms below, and above the one large room whence Patty had fled on the preceding night. The garden around the house was kept in good order by the united work of Patty and Ben; the furniture was good and sufficient, but in spite of Patty's faithful care, began to show signs of drunken usage. All the girl's sweeping, scouring and mending, would not hide the traces of glasses of grog spilled, of burning matches and pipe-ashes dropped on carpet, lounge and table-cloth, of windows cracked, and tipsy chair-backs broken, as men and women lounged against them.

Patty gave a great sigh, and turned to

her accustomed task. First, she bent over the sleeper on the floor; Ellen Grey was a short, plump, small-boned woman, with a naturally delicate skin, and pretty features, with which drunkenness was now making havoc. As Patty stooped down to take off this woman's shoes, to loosen her dress, wash her face, and smooth her hair, she thought of her as the rosy, cheerful, kind-hearted young woman who, ten years before, had come to be her step-mother. What a brisk, vain, tidy, weak-minded little lady she had been! How she had petted Patty and made dolls for her, and given her numberless indulgences! and when Ben made his appearance she

had insisted on his always obeying Patty.

Patty had always called her *mother*, and been glad to do so; but for two years past, she could not call this tipsy creature by so sacred a name, and had fallen into a habit of calling her Ellen. At this, Mrs. Grey had fretted and whimpered a little, but that was all.

"Ellen! Ellen, get up and come to bed!" cried Patty She pulled the sleeper as she spoke, and sprinkled water in her face. Presently Ellen rose mechanically, and, staggering heavily, was led by Patty into the bed-room beside the sitting-room, and tumbled upon the bed. Having made her as comfortable as she could,

Patty darkened the bed-room, and went out, closing the door. Her next care was to put her house in order, and make ready the breakfast. As she did so she kept up a busy thinking, and, all at once stopping short in her work, she doubled up her pretty hand into a fist, and shook it with great fierceness at some imaginary enemy. If any one could have seen the adversary thus present before Patty's mind's eye, in what likeness would it have risen? Merely in that of a mild-faced, blue-eyed old dame in a mob cap—the very personification of a grandmother—in fact, the grandmother of Ellen Grey.

But this genial old dame had been the cause of all poor Patty's miseries. This

old woman had brought up the orphan Ellen, and petted her; she came home with her when she was married; the chief article in her creed had been that "Ellen must not be fashed." Now, before and after the arrival of master Ben, Ellen, who had never learned any self-control, or patience, had felt very feeble and listless, and her grandmother had "kept her heart up" with rations of gin and whisky, commended to her palate by sugar, lemons, mint, and various other condiments. On these stimulants, the weak-minded Ellen learned to depend. Her grandmother declared them "just what she needed," her husband was glad that she had found something to cheer and

strengthen her. As time went on, Ellen continued to take these potions; she found in them, as she thought, strength and comfort; she took very much more liquor than she herself, or any one else realized; for, while her grandmother prepared her a gradually increasing allowance, she helped herself liberally in secret to additional rations for which she felt ashamed to ask. The foolish grandmother died before seeing the mischief which she had done, and Ellen took comfort in her loss from—a bottle of gin. She had no idea of becoming a drunkard! She would have resented such a thought. She was tidy and busy as ever; as vain as ever, too, but while she

thought she was getting a little too plump and rosy, she did not attribute that to her pet medicine.

It was in these days that Benjamin Grey found that his heart was diseased, and a sudden death hanging over him. Ellen had won his lasting gratitude by her kindness to Patty. In an unhappy hour he made a will, leaving to his wife his entire property, and the sole guardianship of his children, "confident that she would do the very best that was possible for them."

His life was lengthened beyond his expectation, so long indeed, that he discovered the fatal habit which had fixed upon her. Greatly alarmed he prepared

another will, leaving his property, a small one, in the hands of an executor, for his children, burdened by a settled annual payment to his wife, who, to use his language, "was unfortunately no longer competent to care for herself or others."

Within sixty days after making this will, Benjaman Grey fell dead in his shop, and, as by the law of the State in which he lived, a will executed so shortly before death, is null and void, the first will remained in force, and Ellen Grey was sole owner of all that her husband left. She loved her children. She meant to do well. She said that her husband's suspicions as expressed in his last will were

cruelly unfounded, but in her grief at his loss, she turned to strong drink for consolation.

Her third child, Peter, was born six months after its father's death, and Ellen found it impossible to nurse the child, without partaking plentifully of beer, wine, and whisky. She now was often overcome by drink, and Patty discovered that her once beloved step-mother was a confirmed drunkard.

With some such heroism as that child of Holland displayed, who sat for hours in the cold night, his small finger pressed into the break of the leaking dyke, Patty put her girl courage to the combat with on-coming ruin in her home.

Her masterful spirit could conquer her step-mother in all regards but one. She could not make her stop drinking. Patty ordered the domestic affairs, she clothed Ben and Tottie, and sent them to school; she said that baby Peter must be weaned —"You will make him a drunkard if you nurse him," she said, boldly, to Ellen. Ellen scolded a little, and cried a little, but her evil habit was making her indolent about caring for an undeniably cross babe, and Patty was allowed to wean him.

And now the care of the valiant Patty with her drunken step-mother, was something like that of a wife with a drunken husband. Ellen owned the house and

controlled the family funds, and this substance, like the prodigal of old, she wasted in riotous living. Patty spared in potatoes and in fuel, she did the work, and turned garments ten times, and Ellen invited her boon companions to supper, or went out and gave treats, and bought casks of beer, demijohns of liquor, and bottles of wine with the money that should have been saved for the support and education of the family. So things for four years went on from bad to worse, until we see Patty escaping from her window at night, to escape from Ellen's disreputable company; for in a drunken fit Ellen showed her olden love for her

step-child by insisting that the girl should "share her enjoyments."

Mrs. Neville only spoke the judgment of the neighborhood, when she said that Ellen's home was no longer a fit shelter for her children; that all efforts of friendship and of fillial affection had been exhausted for her reformation, and her case seemed hopeless.

About three weeks after the letter had been sent to Mr. Richard Grey, in Portland, a gentleman with a valise in his hand, appeared at Mrs. Neville's as that lady sat at supper. The small maid brought him at once to the dining-room, and Mrs. Neville, as soon as he intro-

duced himself, hospitably invited him to supper. "We can talk over matters more comfortably over a cup of tea," she remarked, as her guest took a place opposite to her.

"I should like to know," said Mr. Grey, "how my brother came to marry such a disreputable person as this widow seems to be."

"She was far from disreputable when she married," was the reply. "She was a very pretty, good-tempered, healthy girl; a good homekeeper, and a good seamstress. The trouble is, that she was brought up to take *I want* and not *I ought* for her rule; what was pleasant was to her a guide instead of duty: she

was self-indulgent. She sought to escape from physical pain or weakness, not by patient endurance, not by legitimate remedies, but by the prompter means of a stimulant or a narcotic. Having never been brought up to deny herself, she can not now deny herself the use of liquor; since she has become accustomed to it she feels depression or craving if she is for a time without her potions, and these unpleasant experiences she cannot endure, even for the sake of reformation, for regaining her own self-respect, the esteem of her friends and the love of her children."

"A drunken man is detestable," said

Mr. Grey, "but what can be more horrible than a drunken woman?"

"There is a great deal of drunkenness among women," said Mrs. Neville, "more than one would at first suppose, and I think much of it has arisen from the practice of physicians in ordering alcoholic or malt stimulants to their patients."

"I should have removed these children long ago, if I had known of this state of affairs," said Mr. Grey.

"They would not have gone long ago. Patty really loved her step-mother, and she has a curious mingling of sisterly and maternal devotion for the three children. The poor girl was bent on reforming Ellen, and has uselessly tried

every means in her power. Now she is willing to go, for the sake of saving the children and herself from the dangers around them. You will not repent befriending her."

"I am by no means rich," said Mr. Grey, "and to take a family of four into my home will be a heavy tax upon me. I wish there were other relatives to share the burden. Is there any property left for these little folks?"

"No; not even a decent wardrobe. There was the shop, the house, and a few thousands in bank; three, perhaps. Patty wanted to keep up the shop. She was able to see to the books, and understood the business pretty well, and

she said if Ellen would try to do her part behind the counter until Ben was old enough to stand there, she thought the towns-people would patronize them. But whisky had destroyed all Ellen's energy or enterprise. She sold the shop at a great sacrifice, then bought expensive mourning, and for two years kept a servant and lived extravagantly for her means. By that time their bank funds were nearly exhausted. Patty was then sixteen, and she dismissed the servant, reduced expenses, did all the work, and for two years and a half has been fighting for a maintenance; but Ellen wastes dollars where Patty saves cents, and now a heavy mortgage is on the cottage and

its lot. Ellen will end in the alms-house."

Mr. Grey gave a deep sigh. "What a waste!" he exclaimed. "Well, if you will point me out the house, I will go and see these unfortunate children."

Arriving at Ellen Grey's home, he found the front door open, a table in the middle of the floor with a pitcher of beer and some glasses on it, a pack of dirty cards, a large bowl of cold punch and several cups, a red-faced man lay on the lounge smoking, an old woman diligently drinking beer sat with her elbows on the dirty table, and, leaning back in a rocking-chair, a mug of punch between her hands, was the mistress of the house. The care

of Patty kept Ellen in clean calico gowns; she wore now a blue dress with white apron and collar, her abundant yellow hair had been neatly dressed by her dutiful step-child; the hands which held her mug were small and white if unsteady, and a pair of feet thrust carelessly out in front of her, while covered with the cheapest of prunella slippers, were diminutive and well-shaped. This party of three were already quite tipsy.

"Come in, come in," said Ellen's yet agreeable voice to the stranger, whom she saw standing in her doorway; "have a seat and take a mug of what you like. I don't know who you are, but I'm bound to be hospitable and free-handed.

Here's a seat by the table; come in, sir!"

"I wish to see Miss Patty Grey," said the visitor.

"Oh, its Patty you're after! Well, I hope you're fine enough to please her; my company aint. You'll have to step up to her room, if she'll let you in. She won't come down. Patty used to be a dutiful child, but now she turns up her nose at me who always treated her better than me own flesh and blood! Yon's the stair, and Patty's room's up top of it. I suppose the saucy baggage has gone to choosing her own friends, and in my own house she despises me."

As Ellen burst into a maudlin wail, she

rocked back her chair upon the dog of the man who lay on the lounge; the dog yelped wildly; its owner jerked it out of danger by the tail, and the incensed brute avenged its wrongs by flying at Ellen's cat. The cat in terror scaled the back of the woman by the table, who, howling with alarm, sprang up so violently as to upset beer, pitcher, and glasses. Amid this wild chorus of beast and human voices, of falling chairs and breaking crockery-ware, Mr. Grey climbed the stair which Ellen had indicated, heartily resolving to rescue, at any cost, his niece from such a bedlam, and from the society of a drunken mother who would send a stranger unannounced up to a young girl's private room.

As Mr. Grey tapped at the only door which he found at the top of the stairs, this door swung open, as its latch was imperfect, and he beheld his new protégés seated at the window. Patty, in a low rocking-chair, had in her arms little Peter, washed and curled, and in his scanty night-gown. The child's head lay on his sister's shoulder, and, with a look of motherly tenderness, she was singing him to sleep. Tottie on a stool with a rag doll in her arms was closely imitating all her sister's motions, while Ben, seated astride the low window-sill, was taking advantage of the last daylight to read a story-book. The little bed-room was scrupulously neat. Peter's day garments

hung on a bed-post and both beds were turned smoothly open for the night.

At sight of a tall intruder, hat in hand, Patty's eyes blazed, she gathered Peter closer in her arms and sought to rise, while Ben tumbled into the room, his fists closed, ready for action. Tottie rolled like a ball under the nearest bed.

"My dear Patty, I am your Uncle Dick," said the stranger, and he tapped Ben on the head, stooped down and fished Tottie from her hiding, gravely took Patty by the shoulder and replaced her in her chair, sat down on the edge of one of the beds, and remarked, "My poor child, I have received your letter, and from what I observed down stairs,

it is quite time that you sent it. What a hole for you to live in!"

Patty flushed. "I have been trying to make things better, but now I have given up in despair. I waited as long as I could, for I did not like that we all should be burdens on anybody. My father left us what ought to have taken care of us all, but now it is gone and we are beggars."

"I should have been told how things stood when your father died," said Mr. Grey, severely.

"I was only thirteen and a half, sir, and I did not see what was wrong with poor Ellen, nor did I know what should be done. Everything was left to her,

and she unfortunately was not able to attend to it. But, sir, I can work; and Ben is a good boy, he will soon be able to take care of himself. I thought it wrong to stay here any longer, lest Ben should get led off to take to drink."

"Catch me!" said Ben. "Don't cry, Patty. I'll take care of you."

"The children are such good little things! I can not be parted from them, sir; this three years and more, no one has cared for them but just me!" cried Patty.

"Don't call me 'sir;' say uncle. I do not wish to be a stranger to you," said Mr. Grey; and just then Peter, turning his head on his sister's bosom, opened at his

uncle a pair of sleepy black eyes, large and soft, like a pair which had "shut the gate of joy" on him, in going down under the daisies. With a sudden emotion of tenderness, he took the unresisting child from Patty, kissed him, and composed him to sleep in his own arms. Patty saw that Peter's course was won. "I do not intend to separate you," said Mr. Grey. "In fact, though I am in very moderate circumstances, I must take you all, for there are no relations left to aid in your support. And," he added, smiling, "I should be badly off if you go to your mother's sisters, and leave me with three strange children to take care of. They'd cry and I hate crying."

"I can work, uncle; perhaps I can help in your business."

"I keep a coal-yard," said Mr. Grey.

"All the same, I can be your clerk," replied Patty. "I did not want to grow up knowing nothing, and I have practiced writing, and I got books and learned book-keeping. I had a teacher for a while, and the commercial college master here, says I am a good book-keeper, single and double-entry, sir. And Ben and Tottie would be all day at school."

"We shall see," said Mr. Grey, who was a thrifty man, and admired energy. "We shall see. I have no family but my wife and two little girls, about Ben's

age. Patty, can you start day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir, if you can get Ellen to give up the children."

"If she will not, I shall apply to the Court for possession of them, as she is notoriously incompetent to care for them. Mrs. Neville tells me that public opinion is so against Ellen that I will have no difficulty in getting an order from the Court, committing them to me, and you are of age, you can choose for yourself."

"I will get our clothes ready to-morrow, and try and have Ellen sober by afternoon, so that she will understand things."

"Mrs. Neville asked me to stay at her

house to-night, but are you not afraid to be left here? I hear others coming in."

"No, I shall draw this bed against the door. I am not afraid; I sleep lightly, and if the house gets on fire, why I have a clothes rope up here, and I shall let the children down from the window, and go down myself."

"I can take care of Patty and the children," said Ben, with dignity.

"Good-bye until to-morrow, then," said Mr. Grey. "Do you need any money to get yourselves ready for traveling?"

"If you are not ashamed of plain clothes, I do not," said Patty, "for I have been able so far to keep the children decent."

"I'll come 'round in the morning," replied Mr. Grey, in a friendly tone. He had made up his mind that Patty was a valiant girl, who would be a credit to all her relations.

"Don't come before eleven, please," said Patty. "I will send the children over to Mrs. Neville's to call on you."

Mr. Grey scrambled down stairs, and made his way through the tobacco smoke and fumes of whisky unnoticed by the drunken crew, until he reached the doorway, where a young dray-driver less intoxicated than the rest, who frequently called on Ellen in a forever vain hope of seeing Patty, cried out, "Hullo! who's this? have Patty got a beau?"

Mr. Grey was so enraged that he felt ready to chastise the fellow on the spot, but regard for himself and his only available suit of clothes, warned him against a foolish riot with tipsy people, so he contented himself with saying in a tone calculated to strike awe into the offending soul, "Young man! I am her uncle."

"Well, you aint a very jolly looking one, old cove," replied the young reprobate, and Mr. Grey stalked off, bent on taking away his nephews and nieces as soon as possible.

Patty was up early next day, setting her home in order, and packing up the trunk of clothing belonging to herself and the children. Half expecting to be called

to change her abode, she had for several weeks been making and mending apparel as best she might, and now a little washing and ironing, and making up some collars and cuffs, from the better stores, yet belonging to Ellen, completed her preparations.

Two years previously Patty had committed her father's silver watch, her own mother's rings, two dozen silver spoons, a butter-knife and a pair of silver mugs, the entire stock of family plate, to the care of Mrs. Neville; with these she had put several nice books, a picture, and a pair of fine table-cloths. This was Patty's sole salvage from the wreck of their household property.

Using her utmost efforts to bring Ellen to her senses, by afternoon the poor woman was sober enough to understand Mr. Grey, when he unfolded to her his errand. To his surprise she made very little objection to the loss of her own children. She said that "she was too poorly to do for them; that she was losing money; that soon she would be unable to feed so many mouths, the children were a trouble to her; if they were gone Patty could sleep with her, and they could put two or three nice boarders in the upper room. The children took too much of Patty's time—if their uncle wanted them, he was very kind, and he was welcome to them." After these re-

marks about her own children Mr. Grey was astounded to find that Ellen was furious at the idea of losing her step-child. "Take Patty away! Pray what would she do then, a poor weakly creature like her. Didn't Patty keep the house? Who would make her clothes, and do the washing, and cook for the boarders they meant to take? Patty leave her, to be sure! A pretty return for all she'd done for Patty this ten years since she had married Patty's father. Suppose she got sick? Suppose she married again, as a likely woman, not so old, very easy might, suppose she lost the rest of her money, as no doubt she

would, her luck was so bad, who could care for her but Patty?"

"Your home is not fit for a young woman to stay in," said Mr. Grey. "Your company is not fit for a young girl to meet. This place is not safe for my niece. She has exhausted all efforts to make a good woman of you, and as they have all failed, now she must go."

"To make a good woman of me!" cried Ellen. "I am a good woman; not a better in this town. A pretty thing to set up a daughter against her mother. Now, if Patty that I brought up thinks that way of me, let her go, and I'll not stop an hour in this house till she's gone. I'm going to Kate Kidd's to

stop until Patty Grey is out of this house."

Away she went, bonnetless, in spite of all Patty's entreaties and protestations. Kate Kidd's was as villainous a spot as there was in the town, a den of thieves and drunkards, a place where Patty could not venture to bid her mother good-bye, or to beg her to return for a proper farewell to the three children. Therefore, next day at ten, the weeping Patty, with her little brothers and sister, locked up the desolated home, gave the key to Mrs. Neville, and left town with her uncle, followed by the good wishes of all who knew her, and had sympathized with her hard lot, and her brave self-devotion.

A day or two after Patty had gone, Ellen came home, and going into her cottage opened the windows, and walked through the four deserted rooms. All was in perfect order. Patty had swept, dusted, mended, and washed windows, nearly all night before her departure. The stove in the kitchen was newly polished, and behind it stood a box full of kindling, and a pile of cut wood, little Ben's last work for his neglectful mother. On the table was a basket full of potatoes and a ham; in the closet Patty had left flour, meal, and molasses. Through the window Ellen could see the little garden full of vegetables nicely growing; all around her spoke of her banished children. On

the sitting-room table lay a Bible, and upon it a letter. Ellen sat down and opened it; it was from Patty; thus:

"DEAR MOTHER:—I am very sorry to be obliged to leave you, and if you will *only* give up drinking we will all come back. I can never see you more, or bring the children to you, if you will not sign a pledge and keep it; but if you will only do that we can be very happy together. It is true we are now poor, but if you would be sober and keep the house nicely, I would work and earn money, Ben would help me, and soon we should pay off the mortgage and make a nice living. Won't you try? Won't you ask God to help you to be a

good woman once more, so we can all be one family again. PATTY."

Ellen laid down the letter and began to cry. Hers were not tears of penitence, but of self-commiseration; she was weak in mind and body, from long use of a disastrous stimulant; she felt lonely, and did not see how she was to get on by herself. Many women, left with a snug house, a comfortable amount of furniture, a well-stocked pantry, no one but themselves to take care of, would have felt well off, and capable of independence. Ellen went into her bedroom; there was the neat bed, and in the bureau all her clothes well ironed and in good order.

Tears kept dropping hopelessly on her clasped hands, as she marked all these evidences of care-taking, care which she must now miss forever. Returning to her sitting-room, and dropping into her rocking-chair, she was presently visited by Mrs. Neville, who came to urge, with all earnestness and solemnity, a return to sober habits. She appealed to Ellen's love for her children, but that seemed dead; to her pride, but that was too weak an emotion to contend with her fatal passion; she strove to rouse a fear of death and of judgment to come, but liquor-drinking benumbs conscious and religious instinct. All words fell powerless on Ellen's stony heart.

"Make a firm stand Ellen Grey; conquer this thirst; for one year be sober and your children will return, and you will be the honored mother of a family. Get some one to come and watch you, to keep you in, and prevent your getting liquor; or let me rent your house as it stands, and do you go to an Inebriate Asylum until you are cured."

"Oh, the hardness of people's hearts!" moaned Ellen. "To wish to keep me from just the one thing that quiets my mind, and heartens me up. I'm so nervous; you don't know how horrible that is, Mrs. Neville, but I'm so nervous that every noise frets me, and I feel as if I'd fly out of my skin, and just one good drink of

whisky puts me all right. Whisky may hurt other people, but it don't hurt me. Every person ought to judge for themselves what is good for them. I don't want to give it up, it's all a notion, a bit of fanaticism. I feel so quiet and comfortable when I have it!"

"But see what it does for you. It makes you lazy, you will sit and drink and do nothing else, half stupid all day. It costs money; it brings you into bad company; it is a bad example; it makes you irritable, deprives you of your children's company, makes you careless of their comfort, and ready to spoil their home."

"It's all their fancy; they shouldn't

have such notions," interrupted Ellen, going to her closet to look for a jug of liquor; but Patty had emptied it out.

"I must have a drink, Mrs. Neville. I'll go wild if I don't. I'm so nervous. Oh, what a thing it is to be nervous!"

Mrs. Neville went home in disgust, and Ellen started for the tavern. In a few days her house was in disorder, and she had several of her boon companions "boarding with her," as she called it, but she, in her childish carelessness, did not get a cent of payment from them.

Mrs. Neville had a letter from Patty telling her that she and the little family had been kindly received by her aunt in Portland, and were likely to be comfort-

able there. She desired Mrs. Neville to write her if there should be any *good* news from Ellen. Said Mrs. Neville, folding the letter: "The only good news would be that the foolish creature had died."

The lately neat cottage now became a scene of disorder; the garden was neglected, windows were broken, the fence palings were taken for kindling wood—all was going to ruin. If passing by the home of the sluggard one sees—"and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nestles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down," how much more does one see "poverty coming as one that traveleth, and want

as an armed man" as the dwelling of the drunkard. The holder of the mortgage on Ellen Grey's cottage, seeing destruction overtaking the place, foreclosed his claim as soon as possible, and within a year after Patty's departure Ellen's home was composed of two rooms in a shabby row of tenant-houses. Here she moved her furniture. Some friends of her better days put the place in order for her, arranged her possessions as best they might, and Mrs. Neville again used every persuasion to induce her to reform, depicting the home she might have with her children. Drunkenness, however, slays all natural affection, and poor Ellen was deaf as that "adder that stoppeth

her ear, and will not hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely."

Mrs. Neville left her, once more giving up all hope; as the lady returned to her home, she painfully contrasted in her mind, Ellen blotched, bloated, bleareyed, maudlin, alone in her shabby rooms, with the fair-faced happy young bride, who had won the admiration of the neighborhood by her respectful care of her old grandmother, her devotion to her little step-daughter, and her admira ble housekeeping.

It was nearly a year after this, when, on a damp evening, as Mrs. Neville was returning home from a visit to a sick friend, she met a short, stout woman toil-

ing along under the weight of an enormous bundle. The light of the street-lamp fell full on her face, and Mrs. Neville stopped short, recognizing Ellen Grey, carrying in her arms a carpet. Ellen recognized her old neighbor, and leaning against a fence, rested her load upon it, crying, "Ah, Mrs. Neville, to think I should see this evil day!"

"Ellen, what does this mean?"

"It means, ma'am, that I'm on my road to the pawn-shop to sell my carpet. Going where all my things have gone but a few beggarly traps that once I should have been ashamed to own. I'm going by night, ma'am, because I'm ashamed to be seen going by day."

The next morning Mrs. Neville went to find Ellen. She discovered her in one miserable room, a feeble fire flickering in the hearth-place, the apartment denuded of furniture, until a poor cot, a small stand, two broken chairs, and a few pans and crockery-ware were all that remained of Ellen's once plentiful furnishings.

A curious characteristic of this fallen woman remained—last vestige of her former estate—the place was clean and Ellen was clean. While Patty had been with her to preserve neatness, Ellen had neglected everything; but Patty gone, whenever Ellen got sober, she abhorred the dirt around her, and spent her time scrubbing, sweeping, window-washing,

and washing and ironing her own clothes.

As soon as Ellen *came to herself* she would go among her poor neighbors and borrow here a broom, and there a scrubbing brush, in this place a bit of soap, in that a tub of suds, and then she would work away for hours. Her neighbors, though in miserable circumstances, pitied their lonely companion, reflecting on her better days, and freely lent her what she asked, though to prevent her selling or pawning the borrowed articles, they must keep watch and send for them. Woe to any urchin so sent, who looked particularly dirty. Ellen's mania had been known to extend to such, and she would

plunge them into her tub and scour them thoroughly. From this she had acquired among the *gamins* of her quarter the sobriquet of "Granny Gin and Water!"

Being asked if she remembered her children, and would not like to hear from them, Ellen replied that she had forgotten whether the name of the youngest were Peter or Paul, and that she did not care to hear from them, unless they would send her some money.

Mrs. Neville felt that it would be a cruel imposition to ask a man, who, like Mr. Richard Grey, had burdened himself with the support of four children, to give money to this spendthrift, who had drank

up a decent living. The county, which by granting licenses for the sale of intoxicating drink, had fostered this creature's depraved appetite, should now bear the burden of her support. Mrs. Neville urged Ellen to go to the alms-house, but the suggestion was received with wrath. Indeed, so furious was Ellen, that Mrs. Neville did not dare to repeat her visit.

A year after this, Ellen became—we were about to say a *common* beggar—but the truth is, there was something uncommon in her proceedings. She would go to those who had known her in her better days, and say: "Well, here is pretty Ellen Grey turned beggar-woman! You

know what did it—whisky! Dear, dear, don't talk to me! I know how I am, and now, for old acquaintance sake, I want some clothes. Give me some finery: I like tasty things, and I become them. I don't want any old ragged shoes, and faded calico gowns; keep them for trash-beggars. Give me your last year's bonnet, and a trimmed gown, and, have you an old collar or veil?"

People gave her such things as she asked for, and Ellen might be seen stepping along to beg, a fringed or flounced merino or muslin gown held *very high* from the pavements, exhibiting clean white hose, and carefully laced-up boots, a veil pinned on her old-fashioned hat,

and somebody's half-worn collar elaborately fastened by somebody else's bow.

She would never take a *rolled-up* bundle. She wanted to examine the donation, and if it contained something which she did not fancy, she would return it. For instance: "Here, this ribbon won't do for me; it's yellow, and don't suit my complexion. I've too much red in my face to wear that. I won't have those shoes, they're too big. I always had a little foot."

Once a good soul slipped a Bible into the clothes which she bestowed. Ellen promptly set it aside. "No Bible for *me*; I'm afraid of it. If I had it in my room one night, I should see ghosts. Why, in

the dark, if I looked at the spot where that Bible was, I should see a great shining finger pointed at me, and I should hear a voice, 'Thou hast destroyed thyself. No drunkard shall enter the kingdom of God!'"

"But, Ellen, it would also say, 'Though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as snow. Look unto me and be saved.'"

"That's for those who *give up* sins, and I do not mean to. I *can't*, and there's an end of it. There, keep your things, they'd make me think until I got the horrors; it is right mean of you to talk to me so. Now, I can never come here for things any more."

Ellen was, evidently, partly out of her

mind, and people indulged her. She never stole, and never fought, and her absurd fashion of begging was tolerated by those who pitied her fall.

She would go about asking for food, in this manner: "I am come for something nice. I always was used to good living. I want no beggars' messes tumbled together, but things put in decently. See, my basket's as clean as new; now put me three or four biscuits under this napkin; why, *butter* them of course, thick. What meat did you have for dinner; mutton? Well, I don't want any. I'll go see if I can get a bit of chicken. When *are* you going to give me some of your nice cookies? Ah, that's nice; put

them in this paper bag. No! I like mackerel, but I won't take it. It smells up my basket. I'm going to Betts' grocery for some tea; they always give me an ounce of *the best.*"

When her demands failed to be met, she was not scrupulous about accusing her benefactors of stinginess, poor housekeeping, or failing fortunes.

One cold winter's day, in the midst of a heavy storm, Ellen staggered to the door of her former home, now renovated and comfortable. Strangers lived there, and only two young girls were in the house; frightened at "the drunken woman," and not knowing that she was harmless, they bolted the door. Ellen walked

about the house, in a maze of drunken reflections on the time when she owned this house, wore good clothes, and kept a servant; she sobbed and cried at the thought of past luxuries, and finally sat down in the snow on the door-step. She remained there until nearly benumbed; then gathering her failing energies she staggered down the street, and recognizing Mrs. Neville's door she stumbled against it and knocked. When the door was set open she fell heavily forward, as one dead.

Mrs. Neville was overcome with pity; with the aid of her servant she undressed Ellen, rubbed her, fed her hot tea, and put her to bed in hot blankets. The

next day the poor inebriate was too feeble to rise. Mrs. Neville put on her her own cap and night-dress, and nursed her carefully. For a week she fed and cared for her, withholding all stimulant, hoping that when her senses were no longer under the control of poison she would listen to reason. However, the longer Ellen was debarred her loved drink the more she craved it. Mrs. Neville told her she might stay with her the rest of the winter. She would feed, clothe, and shelter her, if she would not go to her old haunts, or get any liquor.

Ellen made no reply; in truth she was preparing to escape as soon as she was able. After a fortnight's stay, she was

quite recovered, and, rising early in the morning, she put on her own clothes and stole away, without a word of good-by. That very day Mrs. Neville received a letter from Portland; it was from Patty, and contained five dollars.

She said that they were all happy and doing well; that she had now and then earned a little money by copying law papers, but that most of her time was occupied in helping her aunt in her house, and in doing the sewing for the children. As her uncle was not rich, she had always used whatever she earned in buying for the children their school-books, or other needful things. The five dollars sent in the letter she had earned by

some sewing done late in the evenings, and she had concluded she might for once send that to Mrs. Neville to use for "poor Ellen."

Mrs. Neville took the letter and went in search of her late guest, thinking she might win her to a better frame of mind. However, she found her in a state of stupid intoxication. The five dollars she used in fuel, with which an honest cobbler agreed to make Ellen's fires when he found her likely to be at home, and Patty's pious offering probably kept Ellen from perishing with cold in an unusually severe winter.

Pawning and selling her things, and begging rent-money finally failed to fur-

nish Ellen with a shelter. She was unceremoniously seized the next winter and carried to the almshouse. There she so resented her situation, and treated the other paupers with such lofty contumely that the people in charge of the place grew weary of her, and politely leaving her unwatched, she availed herself of the opportunity to run away. Returning to the town, some of the ladies said: "Why, Ellen! are you back? Why did you not stay at that nice boarding place?"

"The company was too vulgar for me," said Ellen. "I am used to gentry. Pretty Ellen Grey to be shut up with paupers!"

The ladies amused at her fine airs rented a little room, put in it a bed, chair, stove, and table, and agreed to keep Ellen in food and fuel. One of them said to her:

"Now, Ellen! see what we are doing for you; we are your friends, and you should regard our wishes; we want you to stop drinking; if you will, we will take care of you."

"As for that," said Ellen, "what you do is set off by what your husbands do on the other side of the question."

"Well, what do they do?"

"First place," said Ellen, "they voted against the whisky prohibition and local option—if we hadn't grog-shops, and

liquor-selling I *couldn't* get drunk. Then they sell licenses, and these men open liquor-stores on every block; how can I stand such temptation? *Your husband* is a hotel-keeper, and when I had my own home and money, I bought lots of liquor at his bar. *Your husband* is a druggist; he sells by the quart or bottle, and long ago, when I was ashamed to go to worse places for drink, I bought of him on the sly, and I fixed my habit by what I got from him. *Your husband* is a doctor; he advised me to drink beer and toddy when I was nursing my first two children. My grannie asked him if it wouldn't be good for me, and he said 'Yes.' *Your husband* is a preacher, but I have often

heard him say that this stir about total abstinence was fanatical. *Your husband* is a judge; dozens of times I have seen baskets of champagne, cases of port and sherry, and demijohns of bourbon, going to your home for his parties. He set me an example. Oh, yes, ladies; it is all very kind to talk to me of a ten-by-twelve room, a stove with a pint of coal in it, a bed and a chair, and food from your tables, *but*, on the other hand, while I'm thankful to you, consider all that your husbands have done for me!"

These were the hand-grenades which demented Ellen Grey flung promiscuously among the assembled ladies of the Union Benevolent Society before whom

she was standing. The trouble was that all her words were true; and as she spoke, face after face of these kindly and elegant women, flushed and paled, and was bowed low with shame. The judge's wife recovered first.

"Pooh, she's crazy! I doubt if she is safe out of an asylum." "If such talk is worth anything, why are not all the people in town as drunken as she is; all have had the same example and the same opportunity," said the wife of the hotel-keeper.

"For an ignorant woman like Ellen to set herself to criticise, and condemn the judgment of all the doctors and druggists!" cried in chorus the doctors' and

druggists' ladies, tossing their best bonnets.

"That is all our thanks for helping the saucy jade!" said the politician's wife, indignantly.

But the minister's wife's place was vacant; she had gone out cut to the heart, resolved so to tell her husband this tale, that hereafter he should preach total abstinence and prohibition.

Then all the ladies of the Union Benevolent Society told Ellen Grey that she was very ungrateful and very rude, and that they would consider her case. Then by them Ellen's case was dropped; for the politician's wife told the rest that "Ellen was communistic and Jacobinical,

and exactly such a woman as had created the French revolution;" and the hotel-keeper's help-meet said that to encourage such people was dangerous and most unpatriotic and subversive of American liberties; while the judge's wife held her head high, and exclaimed that if this talk were tolerated, she soon expected to see all social distinctions abolished, and her washerwoman and the street-cleaner sitting to dinner in her own parlor! Then she shuddered such a prolonged shudder that all the ladies shivered sympathetically.

Meanwhile the minister's wife quietly went and paid the rent for Ellen's despised room, and collected a little money for fuel and bread for her, and promise of sending in funds for her needs.

Mrs. Neville and a few others contributed, and clothes were found as Ellen needed them. These friends had hoped that Ellen would become sober for want of money to buy whisky, but she would beg drinks and hang about the depot and beg pennies, all to be spent in liquor, and often she pawned or sold a decent dish of food, or a good article of dress, and spent the money for the poison that was eating up her soul. Finally, the minister was called to another city, and Ellen with no especial friend to look after her, fell into neglect. As she was without shelter, some official gave her, early in the spring, leave to inhabit a miserable one-room shed which belonged to the city; there, during the summer, Ellen subsisted, beg-

ging the little which she needed to eat, grown now haggard, white-haired, feeble, but still vain and scrupulously neat.

At this time I first became acquainted with Ellen; she came to me as a beggar, and electrified me by stipulating carefully as to the kind of clothing, and the cooking of viands which she would receive.

"Have you any gloves—not with the fingers out?" said Ellen, "and shoes to fit me? I wear two-and-a-half? Mrs. Neville gave me this black dress; I don't like black, it is too dull, and gives me bad thoughts about death and such things. I'm afraid to die, all drunkards are; poor things, they have all bad here, and all bad hereafter. It is a dangerous road to set out on, and very little chance

of turning back. Still, I think I can wear the black dress if you'll give me a nice blue bow for my neck."

"And you call yourself a drunkard?" I said.

"Yes, I have to; any one can see it; but once, once you would have never thought that of me, of pretty Ellen Grey."

"As you know so well your fault, its sad consequences in this life, and in the life to come, why not reform?"

"There, how easy you folks talk who have never tried. It is hard, too hard for people like me, with their minds all broken up by drink. No, no; I'll drink —and die!"

Ellen came several times after that, and was free to talk of her fallen condition,

always with the most hopeless, cold, take-ruin-for-granted air, that gave her best friends the fixed conviction that she was a destroyed soul.

I mentioned her to Mrs. Neville, and received from her the foregoing account of Ellen Grey.

She ceased to come to my house, and I had nearly forgotten her, until one winter's day, when the snow lay deep, I was walking with Mrs. Neville, and we passed through a dismal, back street, and there, before the worst, and most ruinous cabin, stood a grand sleigh with a pair of prancing horses, a wolf-skin robe, a black driver; every adjunct of a fine sleigh-ride. A weazened face, under a much-trimmed, but faded and old-fashioned bon-

net looked out of the window, and I exclaimed, "Why, there is Ellen Grey!"

We stopped to look back, when jolly Mark Thompson, our constable, came down the street with a warm woolen shawl in his arms.

"What is this, Mark?" asked Mrs. Neville.

"Why, his honor, the Mayor, told me he would give me five dollars, if I would get Ellen Grey off quietly to the Poor-house. I've invested one dollar in this team to drive out to our County Hotel, less than a mile, you know, and I came up here in style, and asked Ellen to take a drive. She was mightily tickled with the turn-out, and agreed in a hurry, but then she said she had no shawl, and so

she hadn't, at least no warm one. I told her no lady should lose a ride for want of a wrap, and I ran into the hotel and borrowed the cook's blanket shawl. So now Ellen's off, and I'm glad of it, for every day, this last cold spell, I've expected to find her dead of cold and starvation in that shell of a house."

Away ran Mark, and we watched him, as he went into the cabin, wrapped Ellen up, and leading her out, with obsequious attention, assisted her into the sleigh. Ellen was in high spirits; her palsied head bobbed gleefully to and fro, her hands fluttered around, waving, although she did not know it was a last "good-by" to her neighbors. Her eyes fell on Mrs. Neville and myself. Her hands waved

yet, more ecstatically, her shrill voice piped, "Good-by, ladies; there is some good left yet for Ellen Grey!"

Our hearts ached for the poor, deceived thing; still, Mark's way of carrying her off had saved a frantic scene with her. He told us afterwards that he drove up to the imposing front of the Poorhouse, invited her to go in and have a piece of cake; took her into the matron's parlor, seated her in a large chair by the glowing fire, and, overcome by the ride in the cold, the unwonted heat, and the unexpected feeling of comfort, poor Ellen fell into a heavy sleep. While she was unconscious she was carried up to the ward, and put to bed. What was her waking?

Let us pause to consider that, this woman, if it had been by a merciful State rendered impossible for her to get a mouthful of alcoholic drink, would have been, instead of a miserable pauper, the happy, useful and respected head of a family. The business left her by her husband, might have been increased until she had not only a competence, but wealth. She had four children who might have done honor to any home, and standing in a joyful old age among those children and their families, pretty Ellen Grey would have become notable, full-pursed, grandmother Grey. Now she was a pauper, carried by guile to an almshouse, to wake from deep sleep only to find herself in the ward among

the other paupers, friendless, degraded, miserable.

Whether it was the shock of this awakening, or merely the ordinary conclusion of her self-destroying habits, Ellen Grey never left the bed in which she was first laid at the Poor-house. We heard that she was very feeble, and hoping that long deprivation of liquor would have brought her to a reasonable frame of mind, we went to see her, in the eleventh hour: even in the hour of death she *might* hear the "Voice of Free Grace." But, no; Ellen's mind was hopelessly shattered. The matron, during one of our visits to Ellen, took us through the Poor-house. The building had cost fifty thousand dollars, and it cost the county

eight thousand dollars yearly to support it. All this the poor cost the county. And who were the poor? we asked the matron. She was a plain, common-sense woman, who never read newspapers, nor interested herself in great questions, and probably had never read a page about the Temperance Cause. She answered us: "Whisky brings 'em, one an' all. If we has orphans, their parents was too drunken to leave 'em a livin'; old folk? Their children is drunken' and don't support 'em. The paupers has all been drinking people; the lunyticks comes from drinking families, or has been drinkers. Whisky does it. Whisky cost the county all this, and then look at the *spiled folks.* Why, all these folks ought to been

makin' a livin' an' doin' of some good in the world!"

Yes, look at the spoiled folk! sure enough. And Ellen was one of them. She lay slowly pining away for several months, and one spring morning the matron, passing through the ward, bent over this one strangely still sleeper, and found her—dead!

That afternoon a gentleman, a lady, and a pretty girl of fourteen left the cars at our depot, and asked the baggage-master if he knew where a woman named Ellen Grey, was living.

"Oh, Ellen Grey," said the man; "you'll find her at the Poor-house, an' pretty bad off, I've heard tell."

The party at once went to the nearest

cab-stand, took a cab and drove off. The baggage-master followed them with his eyes. Then he exclaimed:

"I'm blest if I don't believe them is Ellen Grey's folks. That gal is the living moral of Ellen, as she come here when she first married, and the lady will be Patty."

The man's judgment was correct. Patty had married a wealthy man, and this was her wedding journey. She had told her husband her step-mother's story, and they had come to see if they could do anything for her. In this journey they were accompanied by Tottie. They reached the alms-house, just as a shabby hearse came out, and turned to the potter's-field.

"Who is dead?" asked the gentleman.

"Ellen Grey," said the gate-keeper.

The carriage fell in behind the pauper's hearse, and moved slowly the few rods to the burial-ground. There a minister was standing by a newly-dug grave, in the midst of dozens of graves, each marked by a small unpainted stick. Almost without an exception these were victims of rum.

Thereafter a white marble headstone stood in that potter's-field, and on it were inscribed these words:

ELLEN GREY,

A VICTIM OF

SUICIDAL LEGISLATION.

The Curse and the Cup