

Miscellany.

The Old Man's Story.

BY FRANK CLINTON.

"Don't preach temperance to me, old man. Life is short, let's make it merry. Give me the flowing bowl, sparkling in the sun-light, be the glorious, life-inspiring red wine, quaffed with jolly companions around the midnight table. Hurrah for life's pleasures, and away with its cares!"

"Listen to me young man. Once I, too, was young, gay, dashing and thoughtless. Once I lived only to enjoy what is called the pleasures of the reveler's table, and to sip deep the maddening cup. Once I was merry and free, as you now are."

"And what harm has it done you, old man. Save a few marks of sorrow, your face is calm and smooth as a summer morning's sky; your white locks betoken age, but your step is firm and manly. If a reveler's autumn be such as yours, my days are banished."

"Young man, will you listen to the story of my life? 'Tis brief, but full of interest." "Venerable patriarch, you have already interested me. I will listen, but be as brief as possible."

The old man drew his chair closer to his auditor. His mind rolled back over the long vista of years, and old remembrances came lumbering in gaunt shadows from the past. A tear welled up into the old man's eye, but he brushed it away, and commenced:

"Twenty years ago, no lighter hearted youth ere danced in crowded ball-rooms, joined in the chorus of a merry song, or quaffed the bright juices of the grape. My parents, aged and tottering dated on me, and everything I wished for was furnished me. How did I repay that kindness! Good God, forgive me! But to my story."

"I married. My wife was one of those gems so seldom met with in society—assuming, modest and beautiful—and I loved her, deep, true and fervently, and she loved me. There might have been in our home an earthly heaven, but I loved the red wine, and it made me a demon, a fiend, and a—but why betray myself. I was happy for a time, and might long have continued so."

"A son was born—a bright-eyed, fair-haired child, and my happiness was intensified. We had been married five years, and they were the happiest years ever enjoyed by man since an angry Creator expelled them from Eden. Five years of unalloyed bliss, tinged with no dark shadow, but finally blasted by my own dark hand."

the most cherished was to be myself. My pistols were ready. I fired, but my unsteady hand saved me from death—from hell. The report of the pistol roused the neighbors. Croirds rushed in, and I was seized and bound. My life was saved, but my wife, my Mary, the beautiful, the loved! Oh, God!

"Then came a trial. I was charged with the murder of my wife—I charged myself with it. I was tried, but my father was wealthy, respected and esteemed, and I was acquitted. I told them that I was guilty, I asked them to avenge her, but the stern judges only turned away and wept."

"Oh! the horrors of that court room! I could see my Mary sitting before me, her fair face mangled and disfigured, her lovely form bruised and bloody, her golden tresses torn and disheveled, and gored open on the ruby lips I had so often kissed."

"And my babe was there, too. Not as was his wont, merry, lively and joyous. No; he too, told of the horrid work I had done. Oh, God! while that scene lasted I suffered worse agonies than hell's can be!"

"Then there came a blank in my existence—a long series of years' destitute of light or reason. I was a gibbering idiot, and no one hoped for my ever returning to reason or sanity. I knew nothing of those long dreary years. They are void and dark. They are a blot on the page of my life, without one ray of light to illumine the darkness. Then I was dead to this world."

"By-and-by, however, the clouds drifted away. Light shone upon me, and I began to recognize what passed around me. I was myself again. It was as a resurrection from death to me, to be restored once more to the old familiar scenes of my childhood."

"I asked for my Mary. She was dead. She had lived just long enough to forgive and bless me. Then she died—a peaceful and happy death, had it not been for the thought that had caused it. Mary is now in Heaven. I know she is, for she was an angel here, and ought not the changing of her sphere was required. Aye, Mary is in Heaven."

"And my parents—they were dead too. My mother died as soon as she heard of my horrible crime. My father lived to see me acquitted and placed in an Insane Asylum, and then he sunk beneath the infliction. Thus, I, their beloved son, caused the death of two of the kindest parents that ever breathed—Heaven forgive me!"

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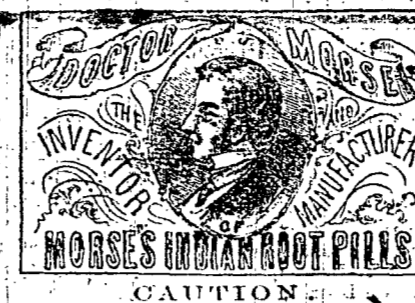
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