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...I am glad you have come William," said Idella Pemberton to her husband, as he entered the room late one evening in November, "I feel so lonely as the night winds beat against the walls, and Agnes has been worse all the evening. William, I know your business in town demands much of your time, yet will you not try and spare yourself from it, so that you can spend your evenings with me until our little babe is beyond the danger of another paroxysm? It frightens me so much when you are away. When she has recovered, I will endeavor to resign myself to your necessary absence."

Her kind words and pleading eyes went directly to the heart of William Pemberton, who, drawing his young wife affectionately to his bosom, replied, "Yes, Idella, I have neglected you and our little Agnes too long, I promise you to watch with you until she is quite well. To-morrow evening I will bring out a collection of books, so that our hours of watching may pass pleasantly and profitably."

"You are very kind to me, William," said Idella, while tears, such as she had not shed for weeks, gathered in her eyes. William Pemberton was a young man of ardent and generous feelings. Having received a liberal education under the direction of his uncle, and possessing a handsome patrimony, he embarked in mercantile business in the loveliest village in the South. It was there he saw Idella Chandler. She was just seventeen, and such was the gentleness and amiability of her disposition, that a few months association was sufficient to win his affections. He wooed her, and was successful. They were as happy a pair as ever knelt before a bridal altar; and none that gazed upon him, as he stood in the manliness of youth, or on her, as she trembled beneath a robe of purest white—beautiful emblem of a spotless heart—and were united in the most hallowed relation on earth, would have dreamed that shadows would ever darken the path on whose flowery threshold they were then standing.

At the time our story opens, they were living in a retired cottage house, a short distance from town. Two years had glided by since their marriage, and the morn of their wedded love had been unclouded. The frank ingenuous nature of William Pemberton made him the easy subject of temptation, and unfortunately his resistance was but too unsuccessful. For some weeks he had returned home late at night, maintaining throughout the evening a silent morose manner. He gave as his excuse, that the opening of his fall stock of goods required his unremitting attention, and the confiding Idella, with a credulity inseparable from true affection, doubted it not. Perhaps if she had marked closely the expression of his eye, or had narrowly watched his step, the wildness of the one and the unsteadiness of the other, would have revealed with too dreadful a certainty, the fearful peril to which he was exposed. She knew that he was not as he once was, but the voice of affection whispered an excuse for him, in the world, by which he was surrounded. Of his absence she had not yet complained; but when her babe sickened, she ventured to plead for the company of her husband and prevailed. The recovery of Agnes was rapid. During the evenings which William passed at home, it seemed as if he and Idella had entered upon a new existence. All his former tenderness returned. He read to his wife, and hung round the couch of the little invalid; administered needful restoratives with a husband's kindness and a father's love. When the child was recovered entirely, William still spent his evenings with his family, in reading or rambling. It was a season of quietude and peace. Gradually, however, he returned to his former habits—drank deeper and deeper into the wine cup, until it cast off the bonds of moral restraint, and bound him in its damning yoke. Idella—the gentle, the devoted Idella—was the last to believe William Pemberton a drunkard.

It was a stormy night in the winter of 1840—the wind blew in fitful gusts, and the snow fell through the clap-board roof of a miserable hovel in one of the streets of ——. Gathered around a handful of wretched embers in that wretched hut, was a pale woman and two children, one a daughter about fourteen, the other a son, seemingly about six years old. The mother was sewing by the feeble light of an old lamp fastened to the wall, while the daughter, read to her the experience of a reformed drunkard, which had been slipped under a ragged door shutter by some unknown friend. This was the once happy Idella Pemberton, and her worse than orphan children. Her husband had drunk till he was a sot—nay more, a pauper.

His property was gone, his kindness was gone, and upon the feeble Idella and her daughter fell the support of the family. She was a frail creature, and the sufferings of the mind, combined with those of the body, were wasting her away. It was apparent that, without a change she would soon be beyond the griefs that were preying upon her bosom. Yet she murmured not. Amid the want that poured upon her, and the reproaches of her husband, she was uncomplaining. Her trust was in God. To him she had committed her cause, and upon him she rested for support.

"Oh, mother, what shall we do? Is there no hope for my dear father?" said Agnes, laying down the book, and sobbing as if her heart would break. "Yes, my child, there is hope in God," he has said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you." In him have I confided, and in him do I still hope. He has never forsaken us altogether, nor will he while we trust in him.

"Dear mother, how can I bear it? You are dying every day, and when you are gone what will become of me and my poor little brother Willie? Oh, mother, can't we get father to sign the pledge?" "Be calm, my child. The Lord is good and should he take me, he will provide for you and your brother. You must go before him with your wants. Take your father's cause before him through Jesus Christ. Remember that the promise is, that if you ask, you shall receive. Cast your burden on him and he will sustain you."

"My dear mother, let us go to him now. Let us kneel before him here. I feel as if he would answer our prayers. I know he will, Oh, mother, let us try and prove him now."

And in that lonely hour, while the wild wind was moaning piteously without, and coldness was pinching the sufferers within, did that girl and her mother bow before God, to test his faithfulness. And never did purer aspirations ascend to Heaven, than the pleading of that suffering band. Never did angel watchers assist by their serious ministrations in a holier cause. It was the agony of a breaking heart as it groaned under the accumulated wrongs of years. The vision of the past swept before the wretched Idella, and her soul seemed to embody all its hopes into one; and staining it with the blood of Christ, she laid it before God, and pleaded for its realization. She wrestled, she struggled, she wept, as if her heart was crumbling beneath the intensity of her agony. She prayed for the reformation of her husband—for it to begin then—that moment—wherever he might be. Her words seemed to be the raising of faith far above unbelief—the sundering of its fetters—the laying of the torn, bleeding heart before God. "O thou righteous Being!" she exclaimed, "who hast promised help in need, bear from thy holy habitation the wretched inmates of this cold hovel. Thou who hast in thy mysterious dispensations banished me from the protection of parental love, and who hast for thine own wise purposes, left me and my little ones to struggle on in misery and want; oh, look upon us in our misery, and answer our supplications. Oh, reclaim him around whom my heart still clings, even in his degradation, and save him from eternal woe. Oh, Heavenly Father! Oh, righteous God! I do believe, help thou my unbelief! Bring him back to the path in which we once walked happily together, and—"

At that moment, the door opened, and William Pemberton rushed into the arms of his kneeling wife, exclaiming, "Oh, my suffering angel Idella, your prayer is answered. I have this night joined the Washingtonians, and if there is grace in heaven to aid a poor suffering worm, my pledge shall be kept!" "Amen," fervently responded the bewildered, weeping wife.

"Oh, Idella! can you, will you forgive all—my unkindness, my cruelty—and from this night forward, God being my helper, I will be a sober man, and will seek to make you happy."

"Dear husband! let the past be forgotten," replied the happy wife, while she cried aloud in the delirium of her joy: "let us trust in God for the future."

"Agnes, my daughter! will you forgive your father's unkindness, and pray that I may never depart from my resolution?" "Oh, my dear father I will love you more than I ever did, and will always pray for you," said the sobbing girl, as she threw her arms about her father's neck and kissed away his tears.

"And father," said Willie, who stood by, weeping at the strange scene, "you will let me love you and kiss you, like I do mother, won't you?" "Yes, my son, and strive to be worthy of it, too," said the father, as he pressed him to his bosom.