

Select Miscellany.

THE BAGPIPES IN THE CITY.

My heart sprang up, with a quicker beat. At the Highland strains in the dusty street. And the drone of the bagpipes, shrill and sweet.

Two Mothers.

PART I.—A DESOLATE HOME.

After some co-workers and I had labored for a year or two in a district of poor people in— the church to which we belonged resolved to appoint a missionary to work in it thoroughly, and they were so kind as to offer the first appointment to me.

In one of the back courts of the district stood a dilapidated block of houses, which, somehow or other, neither my fellow-workers nor I had ever visited. I resolved to make my first visit as missionary there. It was the month of November, and one of its gloomiest days.

The door opened into a wretched chamber without furniture of any sort beyond a few chairs. On one of these chairs sat an old woman whose hair was passing from black to gray, and whose skin was brown and wrinkled.

"Who are you?" she asked sharply, when I had shut the door. I told my name and the object of my visit. She turned slowly round and bent forward, as if to look for a particular object. Then she pointed to a corner of the apartment and said, "There is a seat in that corner; bring it here and sit down and talk to me, for I am blind."

"Why, sir, it's truth I'm telling you. My poor, lost, dead Billie's drink, that he drank years ago, is doing its evil work still. It's killing Bessie, an' her bairn, an' me. Preach down the drink, an' the drinking o' drink. Preach it down, man, an' auld mither like me will lift up their hands and bless you."

"We had a happy house afore the drink took Billie. There was Billie an' me, and Bessie an' her man, an' their bairn. But Billie got among a drinkin' lot at the foundry, and there was nae mair peace for us. Often he cam' home in a state he should na' ha' been in. And speakin' does na' ay to then, ye see. And our house went awrang, awrang. The joy went out and desolation cam' in its place."

"Yes, sir," the old woman continued. "Yes, sir, it is even so. 'In' I've been blind seven years come Martinmas. My sight grew dim and dimmer for weeks, till at last I couldna see my laddie. She paused at these words and seemed to have forgotten my presence, but resumed in a little, as if in answering a question which she supposed me to have put.

"Ay, sir, my laddie, my brave, weel-favored, kind-hearted laddie—kind till the drink took him—he died just as week after I lost my sight. Do you recollect, sir?" She raised her voice and began to speak rapidly. "You canna but remember; it was seven years last Martinmas."

"I do not know whether she thought that we might be surprised at the absence of wine from the table; but she took early occasion to tell us that we were in a teetotal house. 'The mayor is president of the abstinence society in this town. And he and all my childer have been teetotal since many years ago; since as long ago as the Cullossie Branch began.' 'Cullossie!' I exclaimed. 'Are you speaking of Cullossie on the Norlan Frith? I used to see it daily in my childhood, looking across the frith from the town where I was born.'"

"Yes, it is the same; and I am very happy to find any one who has come from the Norlan Frith in my son's home." "And have I the pleasure of being in the company of that Mrs. Beamish of whom I so often heard as the founder of the Cullossie Branch?"

"I am Mrs. Beamish; but the founder of the branch was my husband." "I remember hearing, Mrs. Beamish, when I was north some years ago that the first members of the branch were your children."

"Yes, that was so. Mr. Beamish and myself first, then the childer. Ronald signed last. And he had to print his name in big letters, for he was just learnin' to write."

once when Tom was sick Billie came and carried up water for her and went her messages in his over hours, just as Tom did, till Tom got well. No, no, sir, it wasna Billie. It was the drink, the drink, the cursed drink that killed Tom Molder. It was the pay night, and there were six o' them. They had been drinking for hours. Then they began to argue, and then to quarrel. An' blows were given and knives were used. My Billie got blows; his face was all cut. And he, or somebody else, God only knows, stabbed Tom Molder. An' Tom fell back and never spoke more. The other four said it wasna Billie, the judge said it wasna Billie's knife, and the jury brought in Billie guilty."

"I prayed, in the madness that came over me then, that I might never see the light of that day when Billie was to die. An' oh, sir, when the day came near it was as if a prayer was bein' granted. I would have given my auld life ten times over to have got one look of my laddie that last visit I paid him. I cried to God for a single blink, for one short blink; but I wasna heard. It was a dark, dark day to me. Out and in, all was darkness—black, horrible darkness. You are good to listen to me, sir, as long. Few will listen to me no; few will stay beside me. People are afraid of the blind auld woman. Ay, ay; but if they had sorrowed with my sorrow, or felt my fear, maybe it might have been different. I was with Billie that last time an hour an' mair. I thought, if I had not been blind, I might have seen some door by which he could have escaped, or, I might have seen some great one an' plead for his life. I thought many foolish thoughts. I canna remember them all. I remember best the laddie's heavy sobs. I remember his sad moaning for Tom Molder, an' for Tom's mither, an' for Bessie and me. An' then he whispered, 'lan't it good father's not here.' Then the turnkey cam' and said it was time for me to go. Poor Billie! He pressed my hands between his cold palms till I was taken away."

Then there was another long pause, and then these last words: "When Billie's day cam', on that very day cam' Bessie's sorrow too. Dan said to her in the gloamin'—Dan? That's her man—Bess, we're not going to stay here after this. Bessie said, 'But, Dan, can I leave my bin' mother behind? I canna do that.' At that he went out and drew the door after him, an' Bessie had never heard o' him since. It just felled the poor thing, an' she's wastin' awa'. Whaur is she the now? Is that what ye're askin'? She's out chargin; she goes out every day. It's a hard life. And a bare, cauld house she comes home to at night. My poor innocent Bessie! But it'll no be for lang! Eh, sir, it's a big mystery to me. What did Bessie do that she should suffer at this? Oh, sir! preach down drink and the drinkers o' drink, and lay the curse o' the Almighty upon both."

I made arrangements to get Bessie's child sent to school. But when I returned in a few days, to tell the grandmother, I found the house filled with other tenants and no one could tell me where she had gone. I never saw her again.

It was a long time before the pain of the story dulled out of my mind. For months after, as often as I went into that particular court, and sometimes when I was far away from it, the image of the blind woman haunted me, and I seemed to hear her weird words piercing into my soul: 'Preach down drink, an' the drinkin' o' drink. It killed my Billie. It killed his chum. An' oh, sir, my dead Billie's drinkin' is killin' Bessie an' her bairn an' me.'

MORE THAN CULLOSSIE MEMORIES. More than twenty years had passed since the visit I have just described, when I happened to be brought into contact with a second mother. If the first was a mother of grief, this was a mother of joy, and she was placed in circumstances the very opposite of those in which I found the first. She was as happy as the other was wretched. And she turned out to be a lady of whom, in my youth, I had often heard, and one of the earliest founders of the abstinence cause in Scotland.

And I had been sent to our presbytery to induct a minister in our church at Woodbury, and we were lodged in the mayor's house. The lady of the house happened at the time to be unwell, and the mayor's mother had come to take her place while we were there. And as the mayor himself was obliged to leave for London after the inductive service, we had the old lady pretty much to ourselves. It was a great treat. She was a fine specimen of the Highland lady of the last generation—polite, high-bred, and gracious in manner. It was delightful to listen to her talk—somewhat broken though her English was—as it fell from her lips, touched with the beautiful accent which she hears from Inverness northward in the speech of educated people there. Although she was far beyond threescore years and ten, there was still about her something of the well-knit form and bearing of her younger years. And there remained to her also an open and still beautiful countenance. Evidently she was a reader, and her conversation was full of the most intelligent observation and thought.

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"And wasn't it the case, that it was some sorrow connected with the fishermen that led Mr. Beamish and you to begin the society?"

"It was so, indeed, just as you say. You will know that Cullossie is a great place for the herring fishing. And in the season there will be as many as three, or four, and sometimes five hundred boats in the sea. It is a very beautiful sight to see them sailing out of the harbor and away into the open sea. Just like horses and carriages coming out of an inn-yard on a market day. The boats come out one by one like living creatures. And when they were all out and stretching in a long line as far as the eye could reach on the sea, and the evening sun was shining on their brown sails, it was as beautiful as anything I ever saw. Mr. Beamish liked to see it. And often he would come in from his office in the afternoon and say to me, 'Matilda!—he always called me Matilda!—put on your bonnet and come down to the harbor and see the boats going out to sea.'"

"Well, one day we were standing at the very end of the harbor. And I noticed that Mr. Beamish was very much troubled that day. And when the last boat was fairly out he turned to me and said, 'There will be bad news to-morrow morning from these boats. Did you not see that nearly all the men were under drink? And every boat has whiskey on board.' And it was just as he said. The drinking went on all night. And the boats on the east coast drove against the boats of the west. Many of them lost their nets. One boat was capsized and six men perished. And there was great trouble in the town next morning."

"It was that very morning Mr. Beamish said to me: 'Matilda, if we were to begin a teetotal society in Cullossie, would you take the pledge?' 'I am ready,' I said, 'to take the pledge to-day. And we will ask the children to join with us.' 'Well, Matilda,' said he, 'it is God's work, and we will ask him to prosper it.' And we prayed for a blessing; and God has blessed it, for there is not a drop of whiskey goes out from Cullossie now with the boats. The fishermen are nearly all teetotallers. But that's an old story now."

"You had a good deal of opposition at first, Mr. Beamish?" said I. "Yes, it was so; the Blacks opposed us—that was the banker's family—and the doctor opposed us. And at first the fishermen were against us. But my greatest enemy was my own cousin, the parish minister; that was the Rev. Peter Davidson. Peter was a very good man, and a fine preacher; but he was tied up round and round by his conscience. It was a very troublesome conscience, his! It would not let him do a good thing, if he had never done it before. And he got to be very angry with me."

"Matilda," he said to me one day, 'You stand on a wrong foundation altogether in this teetotal. The Lord is against you. He came eating and drinking. He was not a teetotaler like John the Baptist. No. Every creature of God was good in his sight. And my conscience will not allow me to be different from my Lord.' "Well, Peter," I said, 'I think if the Lord had lived in Cullossie, and seen the drinking there is there among the poor fishermen, he would have been a teetotaler.' "Do not speak that way," said he. 'You have no warrant in Scripture for it. We are to be saved by faith not by works. And it is the gospel that is God's power unto salvation, not teetotalism.' "He was both wroth and angry. But for all that he was a good man, my cousin, and one of the best preachers in the north."

"But after all, Mrs. Beamish, he joined your society," I said. "Yes, it was so, and I will tell you how that came about. It was the sacrament in the parish church, and Mr. Davidson was preaching the sermon. I mind the day well. He took for his text that day the words in the first Epistle of John: 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.' It was a beautiful sermon. As I said, he was a good preacher. And he preached the gospel. But when he was done with his sermon, and had to make his applications, I saw that he was in trouble. 'The application of this,' said he, 'must be drawn from the next clause. And this is what it says. 'We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.' Now there must be ways in which we can and ought to lay down our lives for brethren. We have to sacrifice ourselves in these ways as they are opened up to us. We have to lay down our life, if by so doing we can save their souls.' And just there he told me afterward, but I saw his face getting red at the time—just there and then the whole principle of Christian abstinence flashed in upon him in a moment. And although he did not name it that day, he was an abstainer from that day, and he became the president of our society."

"Yes, Matilda," he said to me, 'it was I who was wrong, and not you. Abstinence, if it can help in saving the lost, is part of the life our Lord laid down for us.' "I am both wroth and angry. But for all that he was a good man, my cousin, and one of the best preachers in the north."

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"You had a good deal of opposition at first, Mr. Beamish?" said I. "Yes, it was so; the Blacks opposed us—that was the banker's family—and the doctor opposed us. And at first the fishermen were against us. But my greatest enemy was my own cousin, the parish minister; that was the Rev. Peter Davidson. Peter was a very good man, and a fine preacher; but he was tied up round and round by his conscience. It was a very troublesome conscience, his! It would not let him do a good thing, if he had never done it before. And he got to be very angry with me."

"Matilda," he said to me one day, 'You stand on a wrong foundation altogether in this teetotal. The Lord is against you. He came eating and drinking. He was not a teetotaler like John the Baptist. No. Every creature of God was good in his sight. And my conscience will not allow me to be different from my Lord.' "Well, Peter," I said, 'I think if the Lord had lived in Cullossie, and seen the drinking there is there among the poor fishermen, he would have been a teetotaler.' "Do not speak that way," said he. 'You have no warrant in Scripture for it. We are to be saved by faith not by works. And it is the gospel that is God's power unto salvation, not teetotalism.' "He was both wroth and angry. But for all that he was a good man, my cousin, and one of the best preachers in the north."

"But after all, Mrs. Beamish, he joined your society," I said. "Yes, it was so, and I will tell you how that came about. It was the sacrament in the parish church, and Mr. Davidson was preaching the sermon. I mind the day well. He took for his text that day the words in the first Epistle of John: 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.' It was a beautiful sermon. As I said, he was a good preacher. And he preached the gospel. But when he was done with his sermon, and had to make his applications, I saw that he was in trouble. 'The application of this,' said he, 'must be drawn from the next clause. And this is what it says. 'We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.' Now there must be ways in which we can and ought to lay down our lives for brethren. We have to sacrifice ourselves in these ways as they are opened up to us. We have to lay down our life, if by so doing we can save their souls.' And just there he told me afterward, but I saw his face getting red at the time—just there and then the whole principle of Christian abstinence flashed in upon him in a moment. And although he did not name it that day, he was an abstainer from that day, and he became the president of our society."

"Yes, Matilda," he said to me, 'it was I who was wrong, and not you. Abstinence, if it can help in saving the lost, is part of the life our Lord laid down for us.' "I am both wroth and angry. But for all that he was a good man, my cousin, and one of the best preachers in the north."

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