

CONFESSIONS

OF A

FEMALE INEBRIATE.

OR

INTEMPERANCE IN HIGH LIFE.

~~~~~  
BY A LADY.  
~~~~~

Founded on Fact.

“Nature is strong, and it may all be borne,
The sick, impatient yearning of the heart
For that which is not; and the weary sense
Of the dull void wherewith our homes have been
Circled by death; yes, all things may be borne,
All save remorse.”

MRS. HEMANS.

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INTRODUCTION.

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It is the common impression that intemperance among females is confined to the very lowest class in society. We wish it were so; but we do know that the fiend dares sometimes set his cloven foot in the lady's carpeted parlor. Wealth has forged no locks to exclude him; but she has woven a broad mantle to cover the disgrace. We believe the following tale exposes the secret cause of the evil, and when this is pointed out, no one can mistake the remedy.

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CONFESSIONS

OF A

FEMALE, INEBRIATE.

EARTH has had but one paradise; but to my happy, youthful eye, the little village of S—— seemed a counterpart to the Eden of old. To the stranger, there was probably nothing uncommon in the immense old maples and elms that shaded the dwellings, or in the old church with its misshapen belfry, or in the little river that ran along so quietly, unmindful of the cares and

anxieties of those who lived and died on its green banks. There was one beautiful dwelling on the hill fronting the church, that attracted the traveller's eye by the singular beauty of its shrubbery, and its profusion of elegant flowers. In that house my father lived, there was I born, and there I passed the gayest, though not the happiest, part of my life.

At nineteen I was married. Charles L—— resided in one of the pleasantest cities of New England, about thirty miles distant from my native village. He was the junior partner in a firm of great respectability, the senior member of which had taken up a permanent residence in London, for the transaction of foreign business, while

the other two conducted the home department.

Our establishment met all my ideas of taste and gentility, and my husband had every affection of my heart. I loved and prized the bounties of God's providence; but few and short were the moments of gratitude to the Giver. My character peculiarly needed the discipline of adversity; I never knew but one human being who had so much pride as myself, and that was my husband. My pride needed to be humbled, but, "O Lucifer, son of the morning," how was it humbled! Several happy, prosperous years passed by. I loved the world and the things of the world, but I loved my husband better, and possibly my two children better

still. But there is no sunshine of earthly happiness without its shadow; no summer sea so gentle but the spirit of the storm may lurk beneath the billow. My health failed, and for four weary months, I was the inmate of a darkened chamber. The distant hum of the city, as it reached my ear through the open casement, seemed like a very mockery; but at length I was partially released from my prison-house, though health did not return, and the succeeding winter we passed under the sunny skies of Florida.

Immediately on our return home, the following summer, my husband called in a physician of much skill and celebrity, and requested his opinion of my case. After a minute examination, he

gave it as his opinion that I had no disease whatever, but was suffering under great debility, the effect of previous disease, and that much exercise, together with the use of some fine old wine, would restore me. Mr. L. was greatly elated, and my own spirits rose much more than I would willingly have confessed. During the long period that I had been an invalid, I had, most of the time, been exceedingly depressed. I had laid the foundation of all my hopes and happiness on the earth; I had yet to learn the wisdom of laying it above the region of darkness and decay.

Reader, do you think I linger long from the purpose of my story? When you have seen the whole sky overcast with clouds, and no spot of brightness

but the little arch of blue in the eastern horizon, did not your eye instinctively turn from the darkness, to rest upon it? So, amid the sorrows of later life, memory still loves to linger about the brightness of its morning. Though every hope has been crushed, and all I loved can be remembered only in bitterness and tears, though I have forgotten the world, and hope my sins have been pardoned by His blood, who wore the crown of thorns, yet pride still lives. I still shrink from the story of my own disgrace.

My physician prescribed wine. I commenced its use sparingly, intending to increase it, if it proved beneficial. It was decidedly so. The sensations of weariness, languor, and faintness at the

stomach, from which I had suffered so much, were immediately relieved by it. My health began to improve gradually, and at the end of three months, I was nearly well. Yet I did not dream of discontinuing my medicine; on the contrary, I was gradually increasing the quantity, from week to week, as its effects were less perceptible.

Six months passed away, and considering my health restored, I thought it would be best to relinquish all restoratives. I did so, but my sickness, as I termed it, began again to show its symptoms. I felt very languid, very weak, very faint at the stomach, and very miserable; and my wine was immediately resumed, and the symptoms vanished.

Once and again I made the same attempt and failed, and then I told Mr. L. that my health was not as firm as I had supposed, for I found it impossible to relinquish my wine; he replied that I ought not to attempt it. Some months elapsed much in this way, but one well-remembered day my own eyes, at least, were opened. The evening previous, my youngest child, little Annette, only two years old, was attacked with symptoms of croup; our family physician was called, and I passed a night of most intense anxiety. In the morning she was entirely relieved from all danger, but I was completely exhausted by watching and weariness. I directed the chamber-maid to bring me a glass of wine. She did so; I then told

her to place a bottle of it in the closet of the nursery, where I was sitting. I would sit and soothe the little sufferer, and then again, and again, before I was conscious of what I was doing, I found myself at the closet, drinking wine.

At length, things to my eye began to look brighter; I called Lucy, the nursery-maid, to see how fast Annette, who was lying in my lap, improved. She said she did not see any difference for the last ten minutes, but I insisted that she had improved astonishingly. I then felt very sociable, and, as there was no one but Lucy there, I talked to her. I told her of all Annetté's little wonderful actions, things, by the way, that Lucy knew much better than I. I now began to grow generous. I told Lucy she had

been with me a long while, and had been very kind to the children in all that time (she had been there just six weeks); and I intended soon to make her a handsome present; but in the mean time, as I was so weary and sleepy I must lie down, and she must watch Annette.

I arose, reached the door in safety, and, passing the entry, entered my own room and closed the door after me. To my amazement the chairs were engaged in chasing the tables round the room; to my eye the bed appeared to be stationary and neutral, and I resolved to make it my ally; I thought it would be safest to run, as by that means I should reach it sooner, but in the attempt I found myself in-

stantly prostrate on the floor! I made several attempts to rise, but to no purpose, and very soon, under the combined effect of wine and weariness, I was asleep.

How long I slept I know not; but when I awoke I was still on the floor, and alone. I awoke to a full consciousness of the whole truth. I have since been through all the heights, and depths, and labyrinths of misery; but never, no never, have I felt again the unutterable agony of that moment. I wept, I groaned, I actually tore my hair; I did every thing but the *one thing* that could have saved me. I resolved, *firmly*, ay *firmly*, to drink but a very *little* wine at any time. I did not resolve to *drink none at all*. I was not, I presume, at

that time suspected by any one; but a sense of guilt, shame and remorse, haunted every waking and sleeping moment. Still the habit was not abandoned; the chains had been riveted in steel, ere I had known them to be on me; and now I struggled in vain! I intended to be very cautious, and this, I thought, was all I could do; and my caution amounted to this, that I drank only wine enough to make me exceedingly fretful and unreasonable, and the whole misery of this fell on the heads of my unoffending children. The little accidents of infancy which require patience, but not punishment, were met by me with unmerited severity. I recollect sitting one day, moody and fretful, in the nursery, when little Annette came

running to me in great delight, exclaiming, "See, mama, I have got tick, tick!" at the same time holding my watch to her ear. I extended my hand to take it, and in attempting to give it to me she let it fall to the floor, and the delicate crystal was broken. I instantly gave her a blow which felled her to the floor; and then with the inconsistency of a mind unhinged, I lavished caresses and candy to atone for such barbarity. The little creature had found the beautiful plaything, as she thought it, where I had myself laid it, within her reach, upon my dressing-table, and not dreaming of offence, intended to bring it to me, and her mother met this freak of infancy with,——O memory! memory!

Another incident of this period is

written on my heart in letters of living fire. My husband was absent for a week, on business in another city. If there was any thought that sent a pang of perfect terror through my whole frame, it was the possibility that he might discover my disgrace. With my strong attachment to him, there had always mingled an element of fear. He was exceedingly proud, lofty in his notions of female dignity, and acutely alive to the possibility of disgrace. Knowing his temperament, I was too well aware, that if a discovery were made, it would be met, if not by a storm, at least by the hush of life that precedes the tornado. He was away, and the second day of his absence, Ellen, my eldest daughter, four years old, was seized

with a fever; the physician was called, and for three days she was very ill, and during that period I successfully resisted the temptation to take any stimulant. On the fourth, she appeared somewhat better, and at night the doctor directed me, in the event of great restlessness, to give her thirty drops of paregoric. I had watched over her much of the time for three nights; I was weary and worn out, and my better genius fled. With the first stimulant, my resolutions were gone, one potation followed another, until all other consciousness was lost in the one desire for sleep. Still little Ellen was restless; the time for sleep had not arrived, it was only eight o'clock; but it was midnight with my senses, and remembering the order of

an anodyne, I prepared it in my own room, that she might not see it to be medicine, and then prevailed on her to swallow it. I then directed the chamber-maid to sit by her, as Lucy was too much overcome by previous watching. I told her, if she fell asleep, to sit there till I came, as I should sleep but a few moments. She was a kind-hearted daughter of the "Green Isle," but knew absolutely nothing of sickness. Had not every faculty been blunted by absolute intoxication, I should never have trusted her for one hour. But sleep, sleep was all I wanted, and to sleep I went, almost instantly on reaching my bed.

When I awoke, the sun shone brightly. I sprang up and grasped my watch,—it was eleven o'clock,—my

head whirled. It was the day I expected Mr. L. to return. I was perfectly conscious that I could not walk, but I dared not wait, I actually reeled as I entered the nursery; and there the first object I beheld was my husband, and the second the physician, and the third the pale face of Ellen, apparently in a profound slumber. With some faint foretaste of what the guilty soul will feel when it stands up before the Throne, I stammered out an inquiry as to his return; and then without waiting for a reply, I inquired of the doctor, what he thought of little Ellen. "I should be glad to know precisely what she has taken during the night," was his reply, "for the servant who watched with her informs me she has been asleep since

nine o'clock last night, and now I find it impossible to arouse her." What reply I might have made I cannot tell, for at that moment I caught the eye of my husband fixed on me with a look that told me I was betrayed. He was pale as ashes, and there was an expression in his eye absolutely appalling. He instantly rose and left the room.

The doctor repeated his wish to know, if possible, what she had taken. I told him I did not know, for I had slept longer than I intended, and I would inquire of the servant. "O," said he, "that is unnecessary; she told me that she gave her nothing, as you did not direct any thing, and that she had slept soundly all the time." I became exceedingly alarmed, but I tried to collect

my thoughts. "I gave her, as you directed, thirty drops of paregoric; that was the last thing I gave her." "Will you let me look at your paregoric?" I recollected after sometime that I had left it in my own room where I had prepared it. I found it standing just where I had used it, with the stopper out. I took it up, looked at the label with a *sober* eye, and it was laudanum! I carried it as calmly as I could (and excess of misery made me calm) to the doctor, and pointed to the label. He understood it at a glance, and shook his head; but immediately added, that if I gave her no more it would not do her any eventual injury. I made no reply; for I knew full well that if I had made so great a mistake in the *article*, the *quan-*

tity might be equally uncertain. He said he would remain a while and see the result, and I, wishing for a moment to think, left the room and entered my own, and there sat Mr. L. O that stern look of misery haunts me even now!

It were vain to attempt a description of that terrible interview. It appeared that on his return, Lucy, the nursery-maid, who was then watching over Ellen, had detailed what had happened; and the fact of my leaving the sick child in the manner I did, aroused strong suspicions that he said had existed in his mind for a long while, from the strangeness of my conduct at times. He had come to my bed and endeavored to arouse me, but in vain; the stupor of

intoxication was too deep, and the fumes of wine were not to be mistaken. He then left me to consult with the physician relative to Ellen. He closed the conversation by saying, with a dreadful emphasis, "There is but one alternative before you, Mary; this disgraceful, fatal habit must be abandoned, or we *part*." The last word sunk in a convulsive whisper, and his stern eye was for a moment dimmed by a tear; but it was only a moment, and he added, "Remember, Mary, I mean all I say; for the future, let us forget this scene, and only remember the time when we were happy."

O how wide the difference with the heart of woman! She may be forsaken, abused, trampled on, but amid all, the

thought of separation does not enter her heart; if the whole world scorn and forsake him, it is the reason why she clings more closely to the wreck, but let the wife be scorned and forsaken of the world, and the husband will not bide the disgrace.

I should have felt utterly stupefied by misery, but the situation of Ellen demanded exertion. And over this part of my story let me hasten, that my fortitude may not fail ere I have done.

She awoke from her long sleep soon after this, and the doctor expressed the opinion that she was not injured by it; but she gradually sunk, and in five days the little spirit had "gone to lie down in the green pastures of the better land."

Reader, in this dark and stormy

world, whatever may befall you, never dare to think yourself unhappy if you have a conscience at rest; for surely an accusing conscience is the worm that never dies, and the fire upon the heart-strings that cannot be quenched. It is true that our physician assured me, again and again, that my mistake did her no injury, and in no way hastened her death; but the busy fiend still mutters in my ear, "How do you know so *certainly* that it did not injure her?"

We laid our darling in the tomb, and we wrote above the entrance, "God took her in his mercy, a lamb untasked, untried." O how gladly would the wretched mother have laid down beside her!—but for me the storms were not yet over. Still, the lesson which had been

21 taught me at such tremendous cost, proved salutary, and for many long months I was not again overcome by temptation; my husband's confidence seemed restored, and the flickering shadow of our former happiness hovered about us. But I felt keenly at my inmost soul, that there was a place in his respect and affection that I never could regain. He made an effort to feel that entire and forgiving affection for me, that, had the cases been reversed, and he the erring one, I should *really* have felt for him.

For the first time since the death of our daughter, he requested me one day to arrange a small evening party of select friends to meet a friend of his from England. I complied with great cheerful-

ness, because I felt it a mark of returning confidence. Not because society had now any attractions where it once had so many; for in every scene of gayety or splendor, my ear caught the dirge-notes of my departed happiness. I made my arrangements with great care and some personal trouble, and I extended my invitations somewhat beyond the limits at first proposed; about fifty were invited.

On the morning of the appointed day, one of my servants was taken severely ill; and in the afternoon I was disappointed in the attendance of another head-servant, hired for the occasion. These accidents disturbed me, and far from meeting them with the self-possession I should once have done, I

became nervous and excited, for my mind had been jarred out of tune by constant stimulants, and the native tone could not be recovered. I was a little at a loss what to do, as it was getting late. I was fatigued with some preparations I had been making; what did I do to remedy a temporary inconvenience? I drank again. Yes, I write it for a warning; and from that moment I felt like a lost spirit! I was distracted by the apprehension that Mr. L. might suspect it, and to quiet this fearful foreboding I drank again. It was now time to dress. I gave the necessary orders, under existing circumstances, and began to prepare myself. With the delusion that invariably accompanies partial intoxication, I feared no detection except

from my husband, and I cared for no other, comparatively.

I finished my preparations; my guests began to arrive. I trembled so excessively from mere agitation that I could not stand. It was absolutely necessary that I should descend without delay. I drank again, to brace my nerves to the scene, and descended. The rooms were brilliantly illuminated and splendidly decorated, but the remembrance of that evening is so fearful, that I never think of the dwelling-place of the lost, but that parlor scene and all its associations are instantly before me. The little I remember distinctly, I cannot detail; the reader may imagine it all. I was far too agreeable, far too happy, to see my friends, far too loudly talk-

ative for a lady hostess. I sedulously shunned the eye of my husband, vainly hoping to escape his notice. Wine was occasionally passing, but I desisted several times, until some of the company had left, and then the thought of the moment when *all* would be gone and I should be left alone with him recurred to mind, and I took a glass and drained it to the very bottom. The company and the lights began to multiply and flit before me,—a vague thought crossed my mind that I would feign illness and leave the room. I attempted to cross the floor for this purpose, but ere I reached the door I fell prostrate in the midst of the company! I remember nothing more until the following morning, and then the very sunbeams looked hateful to

my eyes. Breakfast passed in entire silence, and Mr. L. left immediately after. Dinner came, but he did not return; evening, but he came not with it. At length, at a late hour, he appeared; he seemed agitated, and traversed the room in silence for some time. I sat perfectly quiet, and I thought there was not another drop of misery for me in the cup of life; but there was yet another. At length the sentence came:—“Mary, we must part! I never can or will endure again what I did the last evening. I will not dwell on it for one moment, or it would madden me. I have been employed all day in making an arrangement with Mr. R., who you know is now in this country, to take his place in London; it is finally arranged,

and I sail in two weeks ; in that time I, shall make every possible arrangement for your comfort ; and I give you one strong proof of remaining confidence,— I shall leave Annette in your care. I could have wished to confide her to my honored mother's care, but the mother shall not be bereft of all. When I am assured that you have resisted temptation for one year, I shall return to you and to my country, but Mary, if that time never comes I will lay my bones in the father-land."

How little of the real misery of this fallen world is known to the dwellers on its bosom ! How little is known of the struggles of our onward journey, even by our fellow-pilgrims ; the keenest mis-

eries of our life lie below the surface. My husband's absence passed with the world as a mere business transaction ; its real cause was never told.

I must conclude my melancholy story. Its recital has wrung my heart anew. But I have written it for a warning, that none of my sex may be innocently lost upon the rock where my bark was wrecked ; yes, wrecked, under a calm sky and on a summer sea.

For eight months after the departure of my husband I was inexpressibly wretched, yet there was one star left on my horizon. I kept his promise of return, and laid it to my heart, and it did not break. I heard from him at distant intervals, but I was utterly unprepared

when I took up the paper one morning,
and this paragraph met my eye:—

“Died, in London, Charles L——,
Esq. of —— city, U. S. A.”

He indeed laid his bones in the
father-land!

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