

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST OF THE BLENNERHASSETTS.

THE vicissitudes of fortune is a subject of trite and common remark. In every rank of life, through all the grades of human society, the changing wheel of fortune is elevating and depressing families and individuals; and no prophetic eye can read the destiny of the man, as it gazes upon the unconscious infant, slumbering in the cradle. The insignia of wealth may be stamped upon everything which greets that infant's waking, wondering glance—tones of love may wake its young affections, and cherish them into strong and happy life; parental care may multiply its fostering influences, and centre all its ambition in schemes for the elevation and aggrandizement of that darling child, and yet—and yet.

“A whirlwind from the desert comes, and sweeps them in the dust;”

And many a cherished one of earth lives to encounter its fiercest tempests, to feel its keenest pangs, and to prove “how much the human heart can

bear,” ere it breaks, and bleeds, and dies. We may read and hear and believe, but we do not realize the force of facts like these, until they are actually brought within the sphere of our own vision; and then, in our new and powerful interest, we forget our past experience, and an almost irresistible influence impels us to narrate the story to others, in the hope of awakening a sympathetic feeling, and perhaps, receiving their practical aid. This is our apology for the following narrative, which is not as relevant to our Mission work proper, as are the former histories related in this little book; and yet it was in the prosecution of our Mission work, that this sad history was brought before our minds, and it was within the range of our Mission walks that the subject of our sketch was first found, and in the prosecution of its regular duties was he again providentially thrown upon our care.

Who has not heard or read of Blennerhassett, so famous in his connection with Aaron Burr, fifty years ago? Who has not dwelt with pleasure, on the picture, drawn by the eloquent pen of the celebrated Wirt, of the Eden, in the Ohio river, ere the tempter entered to betray and to destroy? And who has not burned with indignation or melted with sorrow, over the fearful desolation which swept that happy home, when the sad

alliance with Aaron Burr was consummated, and the full result of treachery was felt by its innocent and unsuspecting inhabitants.

While all was bright and blooming in that happy isle, ere "coming events had cast their shadows before," to awaken the slightest apprehension, a proud father and a happy mother bent rejoicing over the couch of an infant boy who seemed destined to enjoy all that earth could promise of luxury and ease. Fond hopes and joyous anticipations were indulged, and through a bright vista of happy childhood, promising youth, and successful manhood, they saw in imagination all that the fondest parental hearts could picture or desire.

Alas for the reality! That boy is the subject of our simple narrative—and for the benefit of our youthful readers who may not be familiar with the previous history of this celebrated family, we subjoin a sketch, ere we proceed with the facts, which have been so strangely brought before our notice.

"Harman Blennerhassett, the father of the subject of our narrative, was the son of an Irish gentleman, but born in England during a temporary visit of his parents. If not of the Irish nobility they were at least of the superior gentry of their native land; and their son, educated at Westminster and Trinity College,

graduated with honor, and entered upon the study of the Law at King's Inn—how successfully, is shown by the significant appendage of L. L. D. which occasionally accompanies his name. An Irishman, and an Irishman living during the excitement of the French Revolution, Blennerhassett could not but feel deeply the depressed state of his country, yet preferring the paths of literature, and the quiet of domestic life, to the turmoil of the political arena, he soon after his marriage with Miss Agnew (daughter of the Lieutenant Governor of the Isle-of-Man, and grand-daughter of the celebrated general of that name, who fell at the battle of Germantown,) left Europe for New York in 1797, determined to make this country the land of his adoption. After some inquiry, he purchased a beautiful island on the Ohio river, and there built a residence, in whose construction, economy and simplicity were unthought of. "The sum of sixty thousand dollars, it is said, was expended by Blennerhassett, in fully establishing himself in his new abode. To the mind of the voyager descending the river, as the edifice rose majestically in the distance, spreading its wings to either shore, the effect was magical; and emotions were produced, not unlike those experienced in gazing on the Moorish palaces of Andalusia. There was a spell

of enchantment around it, which would fain induce the credulous to believe that it had been created by magic, and consecrated to the gods. On a nearer approach was observed the beautifully graded lawn, decked with tasteful shrubbery, and interspersed with showy flowers; while a little in the distance the elm threw its dark branches over a carpet of the most beautiful greensward. Beyond these, the forest trees were intermingled with copse-wood, so closely as to exclude the noon-day sun; and in other places they formed those long sweeping vistas, in the intricacies of which the eye delights to lose itself; while the imagination conceives them as the paths of wilder scenes of sylvan solitude. The space immediately in the rear of the dwelling was assigned to fruits and flowers, of which the varieties were rare, excellent and beautiful; and the manner in which they were disposed over the surface, unique, elegant and tasteful. Espaliers of peach, apricot, quince and pear trees, extended along the exterior, confined to a picket fence; while, in the middle space, wound labyrinthine walks, skirted with flowering shrubs, and the eglantine and honey-suckle flung their melliferous blossoms over bowers of various forms. On the south was the vegetable garden; and, adjoining this, a thrifty young orchard, embracing

many varieties of fruit, promising abundant supplies for future use, not entirely neglecting the useful for the ornamental. Blennerhassett had cleared a hundred acres below, and cultivated, in great perfection, the various crops adapted to the soil. The hall was a spacious room—its walls painted a sombre color, with a beautiful cornice of plaster, bordered with gilded moulding, running around the lofty ceiling, while its furniture was rich, heavy and grand. The furniture in the drawing-room was in strong contrast with that of the hall—light, airy and elegant; with splendid mirrors, gay-colored carpets, classic pictures, rich curtains, and ornaments to correspond, arranged by Mrs. Blennerhassett, with nicest taste and harmonious effect. A large quantity of silver-plate ornamented the side-boards and decorated the tables. The whole establishment was chastened by the purest taste, and without that glare of tinsel finery, too common among the wealthy.”

This sounds like a fancy sketch, does it not, dear reader? Yet this Eden of beauty once existed, and here resided the parents of him whom we will soon introduce to you in scenes of startling contrast. In this favored spot the days of his infancy and childhood were spent; and here amid scenes of such unrivalled

beauty, the artist-spirit awoke to life, and expanded, and received such strength, that all the miseries of his mature years have failed to extinguish, or even to weaken it.

It would be unnecessary, in a sketch like this, to enter into the controverted points relating to the celebrated conspiracy of Aaron Burr. After his unsuccessful nomination for the Presidency of the United States, disappointed in his hopes of political preferment, deeply chagrined by the more peaceful measures of Jefferson, and probably wrung with remorse for the death of Hamilton, he determined to enter into schemes of conflict and aggrandizement so extensive, as would almost blot from his mind the memory of the past, and transmit his name to the future as a conqueror, the compeer of Pizarro, or as Charlemagne, the founder of a Western Empire. Whether treason to the United States was meditated, we will not now inquire; but in the prosecution of his design, it became necessary to secure the co-operation of the most influential men of the West, and Blennerhassett was too conspicuous to be overlooked. On Burr's first visit to the Island, Blennerhassett was absent, having gone to New-York, to meet and welcome to America, his former playmate and friend, the celebrated Emmet. But a second visit was more successful,

and as this interview has been eloquently alluded to by the distinguished William Wirt, we give it as descriptive of the domestic situation of Blennerhassett, ere he was betrayed into those schemes which subsequently proved his ruin. "A shrubbery which Shenstone might have envied blooms around him; music which might have charmed Calypso and her nymphs, is his. An extensive library spreads its treasures before him; a philosophical apparatus offers to him all the mysteries and secrets of nature. Peace, tranquility, and innocence shed their mingled delights around him; and, to crown the enchantment of the scene, a wife who is said to be lovely, even beyond her sex, has blessed him with her love, and made him the father of her children. In the midst of all this peace, this innocence, this tranquility, the destroyer comes; he comes to turn this paradise into a hell, yet, the flowers do not wither at his approach, and no monitory shuddering through the bosom of their unfortunate possessor, warns him of the ruin that is coming upon him. A stranger presents himself. Introduced to their civilities by the high rank he has lately held in his country, he soon finds way to their hearts by the dignity and elegance of his demeanor; the light and beauty of his conversation, and the seductive and fascinating power of his address. The

conquest was not a difficult one. Innocence is ever simple and credulous——.

“Such was the state of Eden, when the serpent entered its bowers. The poisoner, (Burr) in a more engaging form, winding himself into the open and unpractised heart of Blennerhassett, found but little difficulty in changing the native character of that heart, and the objects of its affections. By degrees, he infuses into it the poison of his own ambition; he breathes into it the fire of his own courage; a daring and desperate taste for glory; an ardor panting for all the storms, and bustles, and hurricanes of life. In a short time, the whole man is changed, and every object of his former delight relinquished. Greater objects have taken possession of his soul. His imagination has been dazzled by visions of diadems, and stars, and garters, and titles of nobility. He has been taught to burn with restless emulation at the names of Cæsar, Cromwell, and Bonaparte.” Into Burr’s ambitious plans, Blennerhassett freely entered, and soon they were matured and ready for execution. The result of Burr’s expedition is matter of history. Rumors, which not only connected him with warlike designs against a nation with whom we were at peace, but which dared to affix treason to his name, were rife in the land; and by orders

from Washington, he was arrested, and carried there to stand his trial for the crime alleged. He was acquitted, but his country refused to believe him to be innocent, and after an unsuccessful struggle to retrieve his fallen name, he retired from political life, and died unhonored and unsung. Blennerhassett, as an accomplice of Burr, was also arrested and carried to Richmond, and there confined in the gloomy walls of a prison for some time; but as Burr was discharged on the indictment against him, those against Blennerhassett were not prosecuted. He was merely required to enter into bonds to appear upon requirement at Chillicothe to answer to a charge of misdemeanor, for preparing an armed force, whose destiny was the Spanish territory, of which, however, no notice was ever taken.

Thus ended the conspiracy of Burr. But, alas! not so ended the misfortunes of Blennerhassett. His pecuniary affairs had become embarrassed. His beautiful mansion had been regarded and used as public property. Almost bankrupt in purse, and with a family dependent on him, he knew not where to look for help in his fallen estate. He made an unsuccessful attempt on a cotton plantation in Mississippi; but ten years passed slowly away, and the prospect of regaining a fortune became less and less flattering. A temporary hope led

him to dispose of his plantation, and remove to Canada. But, alas! the hope allured only to destroy. Leaving Canada, he returned to Ireland in 1822, there to prosecute a reversionary claim, which, in his more prosperous days, he had regarded with indifference. All his efforts were unsuccessful, and finally, he sunk to his last repose, in the island of Guernsey, attended by the faithful wife who had shared his every joy, and so-laced (so far as devoted affection could do) his every sorrow. After his death, the heart of that stricken one yearned to embrace her child, and she returned to New York, and with a devoted slave, and an affectionate son, strove once again to create an atmosphere of love in a quiet, though humble home.

For a few years they struggled on; but who can portray the sufferings of that lovely and accomplished woman, as visions of the past rose before her mind? The lovely mansion, the devoted husband, the playful, happy children, the troops of servants, the crowd of friends, all, all would pass in sad review, making the dark present still darker by the contrast; while, as she gazed upon her feeble, suffering son, unfitted by his long privation for those arduous struggles by which alone he could have regained his father's lost property, and thus been reinstated in his former position in soci-

ety, the future must have seemed shrouded in more than midnight darkness. Sad forebodings filled that mother's heart, and planted their thorn in her dying pillow. The saddest have all been realized by that idolized son, who cannot even now refer to that tender parent, without exhibiting the most intense emotion, which causes his delicate frame to shake as though the fiercest ague were expending its power upon his physical system.

We shall give but a simple outline of the dark picture which has been strangely and unexpectedly brought before our vision, and leave our readers to *realize* the contrast and deduce the moral.

One morning, Mr. E., one of the visitors of the Mission, invited a lady to accompany him on a visit to a most interesting old gentleman, whom he had found in the vicinity of the Mission. She immediately complied, and on the way, was informed that his name was Blennerhassett.

They entered a forlorn and comfortless room, and found an interesting looking man, delicate and refined in appearance, even amid the utter poverty which surrounded him; and whose manner and language gave unequivocal evidence that he belonged to a different position in society from that which he then occupied. He

was attended by a colored woman, whose every look and act betokened the most entire and devoted attachment to her master. Yet, no familiarity of word or manner intimated that she had ever forgotten the relative position which, from his birth, she had maintained towards him.

He received his visitors cordially, but with considerable emotion. He referred to his past history and his present circumstances; and he and the old colored woman wept together, as past scenes of happiness and of misery were described. He referred with much bitterness to those who had crowded around his father in the days of his wealth and prosperity, and who could forget his son amid adversity and sorrow.

"Do you see that black woman?" he exclaimed, as she was about leaving the room, "she has more heart than all the people I have known. She has clung to me amid all my poverty and sorrow, without the slightest prospect of remuneration or reward. My father was the friend of hundreds. He set up merchants and mechanics, he patronized literature and the arts, he was courted and flattered in his days of prosperity, and when splendid *fêtes* were given to Aaron Burr and Blennerhassett, there were enough found to do him homage. But when the storm burst upon his devoted

head, how few were found to rally around him, or to befriend his innocent and suffering family! I am poor I cannot work. I am too infirm; and this old woman (turning again to his devoted servant) has done for me what all the rest of the world have failed to do—given me a quiet home, and a grateful heart." Yet, as he spoke, the look of interest was succeeded by one of sad and mournful import.

The visitors relieved his pressing wants, spoke kindly to his attached servant, and left to meet the other claims which were pressing them on every side.

Months rolled away, and the old man removed his residence far beyond the lady's walks. But he was not forgotten; and again and again he was referred to with interest, and commented on as one of the saddest instances of the reverses of human fortune. A record of this visit was preserved, when again in the most incidental manner, his residence was discovered. Two of the ladies immediately called. It was a decent-looking house, but the hall and stairs proved that it was *only* a tenement house, and with sad forebodings, we ascended to the upper story. We knocked at the door, and a faint voice said, "Come in." We entered. One glance at the desolate-looking room, uncarpeted and unwarmed, at the miserable bed, without a pillow or proper cov-

ering. One glance at the pallid face and shaking form of its invalid occupant, and we sat down, (accustomed as we were to scenes of misery) almost powerless to act or speak. Such a tale of want and woe, of physical and mental suffering, was revealed; such loneliness and seeming neglect; such a contrast with what we knew of the early years and prospects of the unfortunate man, that the heart would swell, and the tears would flow, though the trembling invalid had raised himself upon his arm nervously, yet politely, enquiring who we were, and what we wanted.

"We are friends," said Mrs. D——, advancing towards the cot, "and we have called to see if we could not aid you; if we could not do something to make you more comfortable." He gazed at her earnestly, and said, "I know your countenance. Who are you?" She mentioned her name, recalled the past to his mind, and then gradually led him to the recital of his own woes and wants.

Many questions were asked and answered, and much information elicited, but in a broken and sometimes incoherent manner on his part: and we could not describe the interview and give it the interest it possessed for those who saw and listened to the mournful tale in that cold and dreary room. We promised him permanent

relief, and assured him that so far as our means and our influence could prevail, he should never again know the destitution from which he had so deeply suffered. We told him God had sent us, and we hoped to benefit his soul and body. We left, and immediately sent him sufficient bedding and clothing to make him perfectly comfortable. In a subsequent interview, many facts were related. For though weak in body, and occasionally confused in expression, his memory seemed unimpaired, and he gave a continuous account of his past life. To our utter surprise, we found he was but fifty years of age, though we had judged him much older from his appearance.

We sketch his history as narrated by himself. "I was the second son of Harman Blennerhassett, bearing my father's name; and was born on the Island in the days of my father's greatest prosperity. My infancy and childhood were guarded by the love of a most devoted mother, and my education during my youth was mostly superintended by my father at home. I afterwards went to school in Canada, and finished my education. Then having a predilection for the law, I entered the office of David Codwise, in New York, and studied three years for that profession. Not being particularly successful, I found my early taste for paint-

ing, reviving in all its strength, and resolved to yield to the visions which were forever floating through my brain, banishing all legal details, and unfitting me for the prosecution of that arduous profession. I placed myself under the instruction of Henry Inman, and soon became a proficient in the art, and supported myself comfortably by my labors. During this time, my parents were in Canada and Europe. But in 1831, my father died, and my mother returned to this country. We took a house in Greenwich street, (that colored woman accompanied her) and although straitened in our means, did not suffer from actual poverty. My mother's health and heart were broken, and she rapidly declined. Watched by that faithful servant and myself, she sank peacefully away, and was interred in Robert Emmet's vault, by a few faithful and sympathizing friends. It is false," he exclaimed, with the utmost indignation, "it is false, that her last days were spent with an Irish nurse. It is false, that sisters of charity followed her to the grave. She was a member of the Episcopal Church, and was buried according to their form, in Mr. Emmet's vault; and the man who wrote that life, knows nothing of my father's history. For all the authentic documents are in that trunk," pointing with his finger, "and I only can supply them.

I aided Wallace to write his sketch. I lent the papers to Matthew L. Davis, when he wrote the life of Aaron Burr, and I alone can give the proper information for my father's biography. Why did they not apply to me?

"After my mother's death, I moved to — street, where you first found me; and since then, I have lived here. An old friend pays my rent, and a kind Irish woman assists me in my room, &c.; but I am feeble and suffering. I am dreading paralysis, and, ladies, I need attention, and such as you only can give." And as he spoke, his frame shook with a strong nervous agitation, and he turned imploringly from one to the other, and was only soothed by the promise that they would do what they could to make his declining years comfortable and happy. May there be "light in the evening time!"

The Little Italian Boy.

GIOVANNI C. was a little street beggar, with ragged clothes, unwashed face, and long tangled hair; oaths were the only English words he knew, and the only

change from his dingy miserable home, was to the debasing scenes and polluting influences of the Five Points. The entrance to his home, which is near "Farlow's Court," is through a covered alley, leading into an area which gives access to the upper stories of several houses, up the old wooden stairs, through the low dark hall, to the front room, into which, however, we can only advance for a few steps. A cradle is the first thing we stumble against, then comes the stove, a high bedstead on one side, and a table on the other, while in the corner, on a chest, stands a hand-organ. Various articles of wearing apparel, among which a pair of heavy boots is most conspicuous, are displayed upon the blackened walls, while on a clothes-line, stretched diagonally across the room, hang many garments to dry. On one side of the table sits the owner of the hand-organ, who speaks a little French, but is as ignorant of English as the other Italians in the room. On the other side is the father of the baby in the cradle. These two men pay half the rent of the room, which is four dollars a month, and the other half is paid by the father and mother of Giovanni. The father is almost blind, and his plain features are slightly scarred by the small-pox. The mother has a fine face, large black eyes, olive skin, and regular features, and when

young must have been handsome. She has been disabled in consequence of a fall, and she never leaves the room. Do they not look back with longing to the sunny skies and lovely views of Genoa *la Superba*, their own native city? True they were very poor there, but poverty in their own fair Italia, with its mild climate, and its beauty of earth and sky, is far more tolerable than life at the Five Points. And the dream of brighter, better things than they had known in their own land, which played before their fancy as they sought the shores of this New World, must all have vanished at the touch of the hard cold reality. They had two boys, and Giovanni, the eldest, leading his father by the hand, would go out to beg alms of the passers-by in our great thoroughfares.

One day, my attention was attracted by the little neglected Italian. I had him washed, his long black hair cut, and having clothed him comfortably, led him to the Mission-school. He there improved so rapidly that in a short time he was appointed monitor to a little class of Italians, taught several evenings in the week by the wife of the Missionary. He continued in the Mission-school for more than a year, when I was enabled to obtain a good place for him. He is employed in packing mustard, and

he earns two dollars a week, by which he is enabled to support his parents, though in their own poor way, for cleanliness and order are as foreign to their habits, as is the English to their tongues, and total ignorance of the language removes them from the good influences which might otherwise be thrown around them.

Giovanni is now fourteen years old; he is their only child, for his little brother of nine, died last week; and the blind and the lame look to Giovanni for their support. I have engaged his tuition at an evening school, and Giovanni seems disposed to profit by the advantages afforded him. The ragged Italian beggar has been metamorphosed into a handsome boy, well dressed in a suit of grey clothes, the gift of his employer—with soft black eyes, fine features, a good head, and an expression of mingled sweetness and intelligence. One of the most hopeful *graduates* of the Mission-school, he seems already to belong to a higher class than his parents, and may prosper as well in the race of life as many whose opening years were crowned with the choicest earthly gifts.

Moral Influences.

“Go into the dark desolate places—bring out in Christ's name, the forgotten unwashed sons and daughters of want and sin, and pour into their minds the light of truth. It is probably their only chance for Heaven.”

OLIN.

THE society have endeavored to unite every moral influence in their plans, respecting these children. Their object has been by education, by kindness, and especially by religious instructions, to prepare the minds of these little sufferers for the reception of that higher influence which alone can regenerate and save. They have always remembered that they were influencing children, and have, therefore, accounted innocent recreation as a valuable auxiliary in this great work. We give a few sketches as illustrative of our meaning.

Pic-Nic of the Five Points' Mission
Sunday School,

JUNE, 1852.

"They came whence the pale mechanic's board,
The six days' toil had but scantily stored;
They came from the widow's lonely hearth,
Whence the prayer of the father no more went forth;
Some from the cot, where no mother's voice
Made the hearts of childhood and youth rejoice,
And some from the dwellings, where shame and sin,
Desolation and anguish had entered in."

In June, 1852, our Mission school was kindly invited by the Sabbath school belonging to Greenestreet church, on an excursion to the country.

On Friday morning, June 25th, the sun rose bright and clear; the atmosphere was remarkably cool; and at seven o'clock we hastened to the Old Brewery, where we found the friends who had labored in the preparations, clothing the children; pinning on each a badge, that we might know them, and reiterating much past instruction as to behavior, &c. Every face looked bright; the greatest excitement prevailed, and the scene was amusing and interesting to all beholders. We formed them in procession, and were surprised to