



ACT II.

A LAPSE OF THREE YEARS TAKES PLACE.

SCENE I.—*A Street. Public-house, L. adjoining a churchyard.*

TABLEAU THE FOURTH.—"HE STILL SUPPLIES THE BOTTLE."

See plate 4.

RUTH. And is it thus you employ the means of benevolence? Richard, reflect.

THORN. Reflect! I can't—I daren't; there is no comfort left me now in my SORROW, but this. (*putting bottle in pocket*)

RUTH. Oh! heaven, that ever my children should come to this; I thought to have seen them clinging around our hearth, when age had peacefully stolen upon us, and that they, thriving in the world, would serve to brighten it; but all now has faded—the prospect once so joyous has grown dim and dark, and we may read our fate in the once green leaves that now fall seared and yellow from the tree.

THORN. Ah! you always look on the wrong side of things—always did. I offer you that which would cheer you—It always drives away the blues—but I can't persuade you. Oh! no. you might be happy, but you won't.

RUTH. Happy! look there. (*points to CHILDREN*) Go back to the days when industry brought content, and every face in our humble dwelling wore a smile, for love and esteem were deeply implanted in the hearts of its inmates; and so years rolled on, and then came, like the mildew on the corn, the fatal drink. Slowly but surely was its progress: The man from whose lips a cross word had never fallen, grew angry and excited—the children, whose caresses ever met with smiles, received harsh treatment, and at length blows, and the broken-hearted wife neglect. So, steeped in poverty, the home became a wreck, and the streets at length their refuge. Happy! look at the boy who clung to your knee, the girl who fondled you, the mother who reared them—and read an answer in their rags.THORN. (*soothingly*) Now, what have I done?RUTH. (*pointing*) Look.

THORN. I can't stand this, and I won't; if we are in trouble, things may mend, and you should strive to think so. Instead of trying to console one, you try by every means to add to our miseries; but I have a friend here, who defies all the ill-usage in the world, that's one comfort.

RUTH. For a time, Richard, it may; but the day will come when the charm will be destroyed. Its career is marked by sickness and death—early death. The fevered lip and the pallid cheek already proclaim its influence; and, oh! when the fatal hour arrives, what will become of me, and these poor wretched children? If your heart be not deadened to remorse, think, oh! think of them—helpless, friendless, alone!

THORN. Well, I have thought. The girl, she's comely, and can go into service ; and as for the boy, why my old pal, Dognose, he's bringing him up to a profitable business.

RUTH. Service for her?—she is too young for servitude, Richard: but for the boy, I must learn the nature of the employment he has to offer: coming from such hands as his, it can be of little good, and I will not have him made the companion of a dishonest man.

THORN. Go on—crush every effort I make to better our condition, do. What is it to you, so that he earns money ?

RUTH. Nothing, so that it be earned honestly.

THORN. And why should you doubt ?

RUTH. Have I not cause to doubt the actions of a man who first led you by his pernicious counsels to this fell misery. Look at his companions ! who are they?—men shunned and avoided. Richard, as yet we are unstained by guilt; add but that, and our ruin is complete.

THORN. You talk of others ; what are we? Can we mix with the fine-dressed, or your honest people? You rail at this life, and check every effort to improve it; but my mind's made up, and nothing you can say will alter it

ELLEN. } Father ! mother! we are hungry.

JOE. }

RUTH. Yes, yes, you have some money.

THORN. No, I have none ; 'tis spent—gone——

RUTH. Great heaven! and that which the hand of charity bestowed, has gone to the accursed monster Drink ! Oh ! but for my children, would I were laid in the cold, still grave. (*weeps*)

THORN. Harkye—if they want food, let them beg for it.

RUTH. Richard, with that word you have withered every hope—all, all is fled, and your only love is there. Oh, heaven! what will become of us ? (*leans against house for support*)

Enter SPIKE, R. 1 E.

ELLEN and JOE. Charity, charity ! we are hungry.

THORN. Yes—for one who has seen better days.

SPIKE. Charity, pooh! Go and apply at the workhouse—and break stones—and think how comfortable you'll feel when you reflect how many rich and great people—ay ! even nobility—are constantly passing over the efforts of your industry.

THORN. That voice ! oh, it's you, is it ? I thought that we had met before. I know you.

SPIKE. Know me! I've no acquaintance in your style, I assure you; and don't know me too much, or else perhaps you will have to know a policeman!

THORN. Of course; to gaol with the beggar; spurn him, crush him, avoid him as you would a reptile—anything to get rid of him. Some years since you wouldn't have so spoken—you wouldn't have dared.

SPIKE. You must have been a very different kind of man, then.

THORN. I was, indeed ; but don't rake up the past—it lays too

same journey likewise, which is neither moral nor proper. I think I shall retire from the meat line, and stick to the fruit: then they cannot make any remark—but I shouldn't care so much, if I could only sell them. It's innovation that's ruined this business—the free trade, the unlimited baked potatoe, and everlasting ham sandwich! And what's been the ruin of me? Coddles, reflect:—betting, I believe, morally—*till*, I consider, properly; beer, I think, generally. As the beer has been to the betting, so as the *till* been to the pot-boy's destruction. Well, the betting business is as strong as ever, and that induced me to take to the pie line. I do a little on the quiet with the boys, in the juicy meat and fancy confectionery. Well, when things come to the worst, they say, they generally mend; as for mending, I'm mended all over. (*shows dress torn*) Ah! well, such is life. Now to look how my book stands. (*takes one out*) 'Ta'n't exactly a betting-book, but a sort of in-weigler of the youthful branches. I do a little in the credit line. They say trust not in woman; that's true, if there's a policeman in the case, or anything milingtary; but I say, trust not in boys, for I think they take a delight in doing the pieman, (*looking over book*)

Enter GEORGE GRAY, *dressed as a corporal*, R. 1 E.

GEORGE. How familiar all around is to me, and how many happy thoughts have been awakened as I passed by each well-known spot? But as yet I have seen no well-loved faces, met no old friends—for strangers dwell where I was ever a welcome guest. I thought, too, the old factory looked more black and grim than ever, and I saw none of my old industrious associates. To be sure, I have been some years away; many may have passed to their last home. Then I thought of her—what can have become of her? I have gone through a great deal, and what may not she have suffered! I must obtain some information, for I cannot bear this suspense. Perhaps this man—Ullo! pieman.

CODDLES. That's me. All hot, all hot—veal or kidney—juicy meat and fancy confectionery. All hot, all hot!

GEORGE. Do you live about here?

CODDLES. Why, I can't say I *live*, but I go about here.

GEORGE. I want to ask you one or two questions, which you probably can answer. How goes on the factory?

CODDLES. Why, it don't go on at all; it's gone off—not like my pies, they always remain on hand. Take a kidney—

GEORGE. What do you mean?

CODDLES. Why, the old man's done —what I intend to do directly—retired from business.

GEORGE. And the factory men?

CODDLES. Oh, they're all scattered here and there; some are getting up in the world, and some poor fellows are down, (*points*)

GEORGE. You remember, then, Thornley and Johnson?

CODDLES. Thornley! Oh, don't I?—don't everybody! If the pieman were as well known and remembered as he, what a flourishing trade he would drive. They call him the publicans' friend,

thought, what a pity candles wasn't sentimental, or else they'd say something.

GEORGE. You—you can direct me——

CODDLES. Direct you—I'll shew you

GEORGE. Do, do; go and get yourself something to drink, and then——(*offers money*)

CODDLES. Queen's man, eh? Oh! you don't do the pieman that way.

GEORGE. I don't want to enlist you.

CODDLES. Oh, then, give me the money, if you like, but not for drink. I've been in the business once, and I'm afraid. Many and many a good fellow I've seen drop off, through that same drink. First they'd come only once a-day, then two or three times, at last whole days; and then came the crying wives, the ragged children, and the man who used to go neat and tidy got shabbier and shabbier; and although (turning a deaf ear to the prayers of wife and children) he has been turned into the streets, the next morning he has turned in again with the opening of the doors: all at once he has been missed—gone to some other house, perhaps? he has, his last—found dead in the streets. I have seen many an honest, industrious chap, clever at his business, led away like this. Drink's the beginning, and the undertaker is the finish; so I reflected, and said, if I must spend money, I'll do it another way. I daren't enter a public-house; the sight of a till would—La! bless me, I—well, I'll show you the way. Money, if you like, but no drink.

GEORGE. Here, (*gives money*) now, quick, for I'm all anxiety.

CODDLES. (*taking it*) A whole half-crown! Pies, perhaps, won't be out to-morrow; Pies will probably see what's to be done in the betting way, and a shilling sweep is likely to come off, and a six-penny Gravesend, probable.

GEORGE. This way, did you say?

CODDLES. First to your left. How a man feels when he has money in his pocket! You won't try a mutton, will you? because to-morrow the juicy confectionery establishment will be closed. Last serenade;—Pies all hot!—this way.

Exit GEORGE, followed by CODDLES, L. 1 E.

SCENE III.—*A neat but plain Apartment. The Picture of the Village Churchyard, as in Act I. Scene I., hanging up.*

ESTHER discovered sewing.

ESTHER. This is weary work, hardly earned, badly paid, and wearily goes the time, when there are none by to solace, to console. Poor George! I often think of him, and wonder if he ever bestows a thought upon her he once professed to love. Well, if he has forgotten me, I hope he may be happy. If he selects another, he will never get one to love him more fondly or truly than I did—never. (*pausing in her work*) But I must hasten on with my work. Weeks and weeks I have scarcely had any, and now it comes all at once—more than I can get through, and am now compelled to send for assistance. Work, work, work, and yet of no avail; it will not clear away the poverty by which I am surrounded. The

dreadful threat of the few things I have got together being taken from me, the fear of being thrust forth homeless, checks every zealous intention, defies all industrious efforts. Well, well, I must try—still struggle on, still struggle on. (*she continues her work—a low gentle tap at the door*) The landlady, perhaps? I must go and quiet her. *Exit, R.*

D. *in F. opens. Enter RUTH timidly.*

RUTH. I beg pardon, but I believe—no one here? This is the direction—yes. (*looking at card*) I hope they will not be long, for I left my poor child, sickly and ill. I fear—great powers! (*looking round the room*) what is here? (*sees picture*) That picture! Years have passed away since I gazed upon it, and the old, old scenes of joy and happiness come back to me. Again I am wandering over the green turf—again I meet the companions of early days—again I see the old village church—the days that are past spring up again in all their brightness: but I do not meet *him* who led me there! no—no—no! Why does it hang there, as if to remind me of the past—to tell me what I might have been? Why, why—(*staggers to chair and weeps*)

He-enters ESTHER, R.

ESTHER. For the present I have quieted her. (*RUTH sobs*) What's this? A female here, and ill! (*hastens to her*)

RUTH. I beg pardon, but I came to seek for work. I—(*endeavouring to rise, falls back into chair*) Oh!

ESTHER. You are very ill. (*assisting her*) That face! surely I know it; let me look once again. It cannot be! and yet the likeness—Ruth!

RUTH. (*starts up*) Who is it mentioned that name? It seems to conjure up all the bright and happy hours that are past, that never, never will return. (*wildly*) But I beg your pardon—I—I came to ask for work

ESTHER. Ruth!

RUTH. Again! I have heard that voice before; I was sure of it. I know it now; let me look upon you—say, have we not met before?

ESTHER. Yes, in far happier days. I knew you when your home was joyful. Many years have passed since we have met, but I little thought, when I asked for assistance, that I should meet with you. Ah! Ruth, you are much changed.

RUTH. I know—I know all that you would say; I had a home once. You know what that home was. For myself I care nothing, but I have children; and when I saw that picture, my heart warmed again, and seemed to whisper—hope. You spoke of happier days—they are past.

ESTHER. Dear, dear Ruth, do not speak thus; you know not how glad I am to find that we meet once again. I never dreamt of seeing you again.

RUTH. Nor I, girl; I never dreamt that the storm of adversity would fall so dark and heavily upon me; but it has come, it has. But that picture?

ESTHER. I bought it at a sale. I knew that it had once been

Enter DOGNOSE, D. in F.

DOG. It's only me. I'm sorry to see this trouble, but what must be, must. Better times will come.

RUTH. To us—never !

DOG. Oh, yes, they will. Look here. (*shows money*)

THORN. Ah ! where got you that ?

DOG. Oh, never mind where it came from ; the sight of it does one's heart good, don't it. I say, haven't I kept my word ?

THORN. You have, you have.

DOG. And the beauty of it is, there's plenty more of it from the same shop. I don't think your good lady will look quite so harshly upon me as she did, eh ?

THORN. No, no; and to come at such a time too, when we are penniless ! Look up, Ruth. Children—yourself—all without food. He—he has brought assistance. Let the boy go and get something. You won't object to this being filled, just as if it were to drink success to better times ? (*draws out the bottle*)

RUTH. (*rising*) No, he shall not go ; nor with my sanction shall this accursed poison ever enter here more. It has crushed and blighted every hope on earth, and now it bears grim death in its progress. The children need food; I will go for their sakes, but I will not move one step for that. (*points to bottle*)

DOG. Well, well, just as you like; of the two, I'd rather that you would go. Here's a five-shilling-piece; now, get what you like. (*gives it*)

RUTH. Promise me one thing, that on my return I shall find you both here.

DOG. Oh ! I'm not going to take him away.

RUTH. There is another promise I would exact; but no, alas ! it is too late. *Exit with GIRL, D. in F.*

DOG. That's well done, if she can only manage to change it; I think she will, for it is a prime counterfeit. I say, Joe, lad, how, do you like the new game, and the new friends I have introduced you to, eh ?

JOE. Oh, well! very well!

DOG. To be sure, and I've taken a fancy to you; I've brought you a new jacket, new trousers, and a pair of boots. Take this, and try your luck with it. (*JOE crosses, R.*)

THORN. Stop, stop! I've been thinking, and I don't exactly like—

DOG. Nonsense, there are no other means; besides, the bottle must be filled.

THORN. Right, right! and, over a glass, we'll talk about it. *Exit JOE, R.*

DOG. You see, out of evil comes good; you never thought my brain would turn to such advantage, eh ?

THORN. No, no ; but it would have been better if you had never thought of this.

DOG. Bah ! there's nothing to fear; and it's better to risk everything than starve.

THORN. I don't know that; I've got some strange fancies about me, and it seems as if I heard a warning voice.

DOG. Pooh ! where should a warning voice come from, I should like to know.

THORN. From there. (*points to coffin*) Something seems to say, Repent, ere it be too late ! That word rings in my ears, and seems to grow louder and louder every minute—now! now! Oh! there is something in this.

DOG. The something in this is, that you want the drink. The boy is slow; a few minutes, and— (*a hum of VOICES is heard*) What's that? eh! D—n it, the boy is pursued! It's all up, then, if he makes for here. No, he avoids it. Good lad! The mob follow—the police, too; will they take him? A woman hastens to his rescue, it is——— (*a cry of " Stop thief!" is heard*)

THORN. What cry is that ?

DOG. Nothing, nothing; sit still.

THORN. If it be nothing, why do you turn so pale ?

DOG. Another moment, and they will have him.

THORN. Him! who? Stand from the door. What's this? The boy is running. (*a cry of " Stop thief!"*)

Ha! I see it all! Wretch, you have destroyed him!

DOG. You mustn't interfere, or you will ruin all.

THORN. I will not see him dragged to gaol as a thief, if I can prevent it; lost, degraded as I am, I have still some portion of the father left within me. Stand from the door !

DOG. You shan't pass. (*throws him from him*)

THORN. Oh! for the strength of former days. I am enfeebled, helpless. The warning voice has not spoken in vain; but, oh! may my bitter curse——

DOG. It is too late; if you must curse, let it be upon the cause of all your miseries—the bottle.

RICHARD *sinks into chair. Closed in.*

SCENE V.—*A front Street.*

Enter CODDLES and KITTY, R. 1 E.

CODDLES Oh! don't talk to me; go to your policeman. He'll be on his beat presently. It's no use 'sinivating with me. There's Gravesend and shrimps in the distance, for me—oysters, perhaps—a policeman for you.

KITTY. Don't you talk too fast, or else I shall really be compelled to comply with the anxious urgings of that active officer; but you have been the means of bringing two loving hearts together, and you don't go to the public-house so much, and I like you for that; and I am glad to see that you have taken to a new line of business.

CODDLES. Yes, but you have never bought any of the pies, and I do not like you for that.

KITTY. Then, you know, I always had a partiality for you.

CODDLES. Yes, and you show it by smiling at me, and walking arm-in-arm with the policeman.

KITTY. Well, that was only done because I like to make everybody happy. An old aunt of mine died lately.

CODDLES. Not the old lady with the private property ?

BINKS. Two bad pieces of money were passed to-night; they have been traced to him.

CODDLES. Ah! then your two bad pieces have made a hit. He may be the author of a hundred pieces.

BINKS. Come, this way. (*dragging him off*)

(*a violent scream is heard, and a cry of "Murder"*)

DOG. What's that?

BOTH. A cry of murder!

DOG. By George, he has killed her!

BINKS. Take care of him.

Buns off, L.

CODDLES. YOU tremble, and look pale. So you know all about this, too. I don't envy you your feelings. Come along. Queer originally, I believe; bad generally, admitted; transportation, certainly, without a doubt. Come along. Ah! would you! I can do it for you.

Drays him off, struggling, R.

SCENE VIII.—*The Boom, as before.*

TABLEAU THE SEVENTH—"THE BOTTLE HAS DONE ITS WORK."

RICHARD *is seized.*

See plate 7.

THORN. Ruth! Ruth! What, don't you answer?

BINKS. She will never speak again.

THORN. Never! What's here, then? Why these people? I've done nothing. What does it all mean?

BINKS. Death—by this! (*pointing to bottle*)

THORN. (*involuntarily shrinks, passes his hand wildly across his forehead, and with a mad laugh*) Ha! ha! The bottle has done its work! (*falls*)

SCENE IX.—*A Room.*

Enter GEORGE and ESTHER, R. 1 E.

GEORGE. Don't droop, Esther! Tears are unavailing now, and what is past cannot be recalled.

ESTHER. I thought we should have rendered them so happy—talked of old times, of the days when their hearts were light, and the sun of prosperity shone around them. She was one of my earliest friends, too, and so anxious ever for our welfare; and this to occur after our long, long parting! Oh, George! the return which brought joy to my heart is now deeply shadowed, and I cannot check these tears; for 'tis very hard to lose an old, old friend. And how deep the regret, when by sudden and violent means. Oh, George! do not think me unkind; but indeed I can't help it.

GEORGE. A deep and moral lesson may be learned from this, and I thank heaven that I avoided the pernicious instrument which, years back, tempted me.

ESTHER. But the unhappy husband—is there no hope?

GEORGE. Alas! no. I tremble when I think of his state! His brain's turned—his senses fled—he is unconscious of everything around; his last refuge is the madhouse. Oh! Esther, this—this is too painful to dwell upon; let us leave this place.

ESTHER. Yet I would see her once again—for the last, last time;

only to press her hand—to drop a tear in memory of old, old times.

GEORGE. I guess your meaning; it is impossible now to comply with your wish. Come, Esther, you must strive to forget; you must.

ESTHER. Poor Ruth ! GEORGE *sorrowfully leads her out, R.*

SCENE X. AND LAST.

TABLEAU THE EIGHTH—" THE MADHOUSE."

THORNLEY *chained. The BOY and the GIRL, and the KEEPER looking through door. See plate 8.*

JOB. Don't you know me, father;

THORN. Know ! what is there to know ? Yes; it's warmer here, and better than the cold and muddy streets. I can't tell what has brought this change about, I can't; I've been puzzling my brain, but to no purpose. It don't beat now as it used to do. It's very strange why she don't come; I never knew her quit my side till now. Why don't she come?

JOE. She never will come again. Don't you know ?—think !

THORN. I tell you that I don't know; and what have I got to think about ? Who are you that ask it ?

JOE. Your son.

THORN. What, my son! No, no; he is ragged, and in the streets. My son; he's not such a fine gentleman as you, and yet—say it again.

JOE. Your son.

THORN. There is a mist before me, and I cannot distinguish your face; but the voice is very like, very. But, if you are my son, you can tell me where your mother is. Ha ! ha ! you can tell me that.

JOE. She is dead !

THORN. Dead!—who killed her? It must have been very sudden. Ah! I know; it was a blow—a heavy one; and her last words are now ringing in my ears : "Live and repent!" Ha! ha! but no one knows who dealt that blow, eh ?

JOE. The hand I now grasp.

THORN. Me ! Why, she has spoken a thousand times with pride, that I never raised my hand against her; the whole world knew that. Ah ! (*with a sudden burst*)—oh ! yes—I did. It was this hand, and it grasped the instrument of destruction—mine. Oh ! what a scream, and what a horrid cry rings through the streets in the dark night. It is murder! Ha, ha! and they say the husband has killed his wife; and so he did—so he did. Look at the red stains around; look! it flows like a river; it creeps up to my feet; take me from it, or I shall perish in that dark sea. Closer yet. And, oh ! what a face is that glaring full upon me from the crimson pool! It is her's—Ruth's; I know it. She tells me I have murdered her, and a thousand voices echo it. And what is that by her side? It is the weapon of death; and a grinning fiend rises from the vapour, and mocks and points. It is the bottle ! and the spirit of evil now madly laughs at its victim. Closer and closer yet. Oh i take me out—take me—(*sinks exhausted*)

JOE. Sister, go and take off your finery, I see the end of all this. I'll go back to my rags ; honesty lasts, but these betray. Spuru all temptation, for here is a warning—a bitter lesson. I was half a thief, but this has changed me. Good-bye, father.

Enter GEORGE, followed by KEEPER.

KEEPER. You'll find him there. 'Tis nearly time for visitors to depart; take your farewell; for many days will elapse before you see him again. (*retires*)

GEORGE. Do you not remember me ? (*advances to THORNLEY*)

THORN. I tell you, I know nothing; never had—Oh ! ah ! yes, I had a home, and there was a bright face there, ever beaming with smiles ; children too, who loved. Where are they all? where is she? Gone! No more of the bitter scorn for her. I know where she is, that kind and loving mother ; I'll tell you—there, there! Clouds open above me, and all is bright beyond. I see her sweet face looking faintly down upon me, but it is not the same smile of former days, for it is cold and angered ; *but she is there!* Her spirit has fled to heaven ; but the children, I left them last in rags—what, what will be their fate? No hope for them, none

GEORGE. Yes, they shall be my care ; I will find them a home—I will protect them.

THORN. You ! Who are you that offers this ?

GEORGE. A friend, who stretches forth a humble willing but a hand to snatch them from impending vice.

THORN. A friend—a friend to me! Why, who is this? The wretched have no friends—I found it so. Oh! I must know more of you—Oh ! oh! I must!

KEEPER. His mad fit is coming on; you must part company now.

THORN. Part! who spoke of parting? No, no, don't part us; I must have company; I dare not be alone again ; the red stream rises. What sudden burst of light was that ? It was one momentary ray of reason—the truth. I killed her, and I am mad. The shroud of darkness is drawn aside. She is dead, and heeds not now my tears. Oh ! friend—for I know you now—and you, my children, judge me not too sternly ; I feel that I am fast dying; let me die here; but, oh ! what hope is there for me? (*clinging to CHILDREN*)

GEORGE. Resignation. Pray for forgiveness there.

THORN. Your pitying face seems to say a contrite spirit may be remembered at the Throne of Mercy. Kneel, kneel with me, children ; and may thy tears wash away a parent's sin!

GEORGE. (*affected*) Richard!

THORN. Hush ! their lips are stirred in prayer—for me, for me ! Fold your arms around me—closer yet. What mist is that which is falling ? what bubbling is this next my heart ? Pray on, pray on—the sound grows fainter—fainter—I die in prayer. (*falls back*)

Curtain.