

Charles Duran eBook

Charles Duran

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CHAPTER I.

The Duran Homestead.

Before giving the history of Charles Duran's birth, life, and early death, I will partially describe his father's residence. It was situated in the town of —, in the State of Connecticut, and about six miles from the west bank of the beautiful Connecticut river. The house stood on a level road, running north and south, and was about one mile from the centre of the town.

Mr. Duran's house was large and commodious. It was built of wood, two stories high, and painted a deep yellow. In the front was a fine court-yard. In this yard were lilacs of a large growth, roses of various kinds, and flowering almonds. These shrubs blossomed early in the spring, and sent forth their fragrance to perfume the air.

On the south was a rich and well-cultivated garden, producing an abundance of vegetables, gooseberries, currants, and raspberries. The borders of the main alley were decked with pionies, pinks, and sweet-williams.

Between the garden and the house was the well. A long sweep, resting on the top of a high post, with a pole fastened to the upper end, was the rude contrivance for drawing water. To the lower end of the pole was attached a bucket. How many of New-England's sons remember with delight the "old oaken bucket that hung in the well!"

On the north side of the house was a small orchard. In the rear were the barn, sheds, crib, and other out-buildings.

The grounds in the immediate neighborhood were level or slightly undulated. On the north and east were beautiful meadows. On the south and west were excellent tillage and pasture lands. The season that I spent there was one of nature's bountifulness. The tall herd's-grass, the rustling corn, and the whitened grain waved in the summer's breeze, and bespoke the plenty that followed the toil and industry of the husbandman. The herds were feeding in the fields. The innocent lambs, free from care, were leaping and frisking about—some in the sun and some in the shade—while their more sober dames were either grazing, or quietly masticating the food they had previously collected.

Half encircling these premises was a fine stream of water, varying from three to seven yards in width. It was supplied with dace, trout, roach, and perch. Its plaintive, monotonous murmur sometimes impressed the mind with sadness. This was soon dispelled, however, by the twittering, the glee, and the sweet notes of the birds, that hopped from spray to spray, or quietly perched themselves on the overhanging branches.

Some little distance to the northwest of Mr. Duran's house was a forest of thrifty growth, covered with a varied and beautiful foliage. Its shady bowers and pleasant walks made it a delightful place of resort,—especially toward the time of sunset. Nature seemed to lend to it then peculiar charms.

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In the centre of the town stood the old church, antiquated in its appearance, but venerable and holy in its associations. In that old-fashioned church have been settled three successive ministers of the gospel. In those high-backed, square pews were other generations wont to sit. Those pastors and their flocks now sleep in the grave. Their sons occupy their places in the sanctuary, and another herald of the cross proclaims to them the word of life. It was in this pleasant place, which I have briefly described, that Charles Duran was born.

CHAPTER II.

THE BIRTH OF CHARLES.

The birth of Charles was an occasion of great joy in Mr. Duran's family. Blessings long withheld are frequently more highly prized when at length received. Mr. Duran had no children, and was now past the meridian of life. To him this child seemed like one born out of due time.

It was amusing to see the effect produced on the parents by this, till recently, unexpected event. "Well, Molly," said Mr. Jones,—a neighbor of Mr. Duran, whose wife had just been to see the strange visitant, and who had reared a large family of children,—"how do Mr. and Mrs. Duran act with the boy?" "Act? why just like two grown-up children. And they think it is the most wonderful child that ever was born. But they don't know what it may live to be!"

These last words were spoken in a tone of voice which told of hidden springs of sorrow. One of Mrs. Jones' own dear children, a promising, lovely boy, had early become intemperate, and was now sleeping in a drunkard's grave!

Having passed through the ordinary nursery incidents of the first months of infancy, Charley—for so he was familiarly called—became a fine fat child. "Sweet boy," said his mother, as she rather clumsily patted his cheeks, and felt of his tender limbs, "you will be a comfort to your parents in their old age."

"I was just thinking of that," added the father. "What a blessing he will be to us! He will manage the farm—administer to our comfort, and inherit our estate."

Many a bright sunny morning has been followed by a dark cloudy evening. Our supposed blessings often prove to us a source of disappointment and sorrow. I have seen the mother clasp her lovely infant to her breast, and fondly and dotingly caress it, and press its little hands and feet, soft as velvet, with her lips. And I have seen that child, the rainbow of promise, and the cause of so much joy, bring down that mother's head, ere it was gray, with sorrow to the grave.

Thoughts like these, however, never crossed the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Duran. They dreamed not that sickness and death might blast their hopes, and leave them more lonely than they were before. So staid and uniform had been their own life, that they never once supposed that Charles, if he should grow up, could pursue any other course.

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Every day little Charles became more and more the object of cherished hopes and affections. The hearts of the parents were bound up in him. He became their idol. His wants, real and imaginary, were all met. His danger was of being spoiled by too much indulgence.

"I believe they will kill him with kindness," was the remark of Ann, a colored woman, who had long lived in the family. "It is just the way Mr. Parsons used to do with his Jim, who never amounted to anything."

CHAPTER III.

HIS EARLY TRAINING.

"Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it." Prov. xxii, 6. The proper training of children is of the utmost importance. Upon it to a great extent depend their usefulness and happiness in the world. And as the happiness of parents is so intimately connected with the course of conduct pursued by their children, it should be with them a constant study how they may promote the well-being of their offspring.

On this subject much has been said and written. Some recommend indulgence as the surest way to give a child a good disposition, and to lead to the formation of correct habits. Others urge the necessity of restraint and uncompromising obedience, on the part of children, to the commands of their parents. There may be extremes in both. Children should be taught to fear and love their parents, and to respect their wishes. The government of children should be strictly parental. The parent's will should be the law of the child. Proper indulgence should be allowed; entire obedience enforced. Parents and children should both remember the words of the apostle: "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." Col. iii, 20, 21.

Mr. and Mrs. Duran were very indulgent to their only child. His wants were met with a liberal hand, and his wishes, as far as possible, gratified. If his desires were not immediately granted, he soon learned that a little crying would accomplish his object.

Improper indulgence begets unlawful desires. Unlawful desires can never be fully satisfied. So it was with Charles Duran: everything he saw, he wanted. When he was not indulged, as he could not be always, he soon showed his bad spirit. Sometimes he pouted out his lips, and had a long fit of the sulks.

Perhaps my readers never saw a child affected with the sulks. I will briefly describe them. First, the eyes begin to roll rapidly in their sockets, and the sight turns upward. The chin falls down a little, and the corners of the mouth are slightly drawn back. The



lower lip then rolls down nearly to the chin. Soon a whining commences, which grows louder and louder, and becomes disagreeable to every person present. At the same time the eyes turn red, the face gets out of shape, and the child becomes

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blind! I saw a little boy once have the sulks so badly that when his mother sent him into his room to get his apron, before sitting down to dinner, he could not find it, though it was in plain sight! Before he was two years old, Charles showed a very bad disposition. This, instead of being corrected, was fostered by the training which he received. To the domestics in the family he was insolent and unkind; and even to his parents, "*I will*" and "*I won't*" were said with fearful frequency. Still the doting parents would merely say to him, "You should not do so, Charles! You should say, 'I don't want to,' or, 'I do want to,'" as the case might be. Thus they indirectly taught him disobedience, which he was learning fast enough without such assistance. In this way did these parents, with cruel kindness, help on the ruin of their child!

Charles Duran, with all his faults, was a bright, active boy. What he needed was training,—*parental training*. His parents committed two very common errors: they promised him correction for his disobedience, without inflicting the punishment; and they often repeated his sayings, and spoke of his doings, to others, in his presence. Parents should always keep good faith with their children; and, while they encourage them, when they are alone, by suitable and well-timed praise, they should rarely repeat what they have said, or speak of what they have done, to others, in their presence. This is injurious to the child, betrays vanity in the parents, and is not very edifying to others. The singing of a young raven may be music to its parents, but to us it is like the cawing of a crow.

CHAPTER IV.

CHARLES DURAN AT SCHOOL.

Charles was now old enough to go to school. He was accordingly sent to the district school, not far from his father's house. Teachers say that they can tell whether children are good and obedient at home by their conduct in school. Those children who mind their parents will generally obey their teachers; and those scholars that are obedient generally learn well.

How was it with Charles Duran at school? Did he obey his teacher? At first, as all things in the school were new and strange to him, he was somewhat restrained. He soon, however, became acquainted with his teacher and the scholars, and as soon learned to break the rules of the school. He became disrespectful to his teacher, and caused him much trouble.

Charles was also very inattentive to his books. The teacher did the best he could to make him learn; but his lessons were never more than half learned, and the greater part of the time they were not studied at all: and, though naturally he was a bright, smart boy, he seemed determined to grow up a blockhead.

The next thing I notice in the school history of this boy is the unkindness which he showed his school-fellows. If he played with them, he was quite sure to get offended before the play was through. He was surly, self-willed, and disposed always to have his own way in everything.

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One day Samuel Howard, a boy smaller than himself, was flying his kite. There was a fine breeze, and the kite floated beautifully in the air. Charles seized the twine, and began to pull in the kite. Samuel remonstrated with him; but the more he remonstrated the more ugly was Charles. He pulled in the kite, tore it all to pieces, and broke and snarled the twine. Samuel cried at the loss of his pretty kite, and Charles Duran was mean enough to mimic the boy whom he had thus injured.

At another time, a little girl, whose name was Helen Fay, was returning from school: Charles threw a stone, and hit her on the cheek-bone. It cut a great gash in her face, and made the blood run freely. Had the stone struck a little higher, it would probably have put out her eye; as it was, her face was badly scarred.

A poor widow lady lived some distance beyond Mr. Duran's house. She had two dear little children, John and Louisa, whom she sent to school. This poor mother was industrious and very neat, and her children were always dressed in neat, clean clothes. Charles Duran, who was out of his element when he was not in mischief, seemed to take delight in tormenting these little children. On their way from school one day, when they had on their nice clothes, he covered them from head to foot with dirt and mud. In that sad plight John and Louisa went home crying. Their mother felt as badly as they did, when she saw the ugliness of her neighbor's spoiled child.

So constantly was Charles injuring the smaller boys and girls in the school that none of them loved him. If he got hurt, none of them pitied him. The whole school seemed glad, one day, when he had shoved a little girl into a mud-puddle, and upset an inkstand on a boy's writing-book, and spoiled it, to see the master give him a severe whipping,—such as he deserved.

It is not agreeable to dwell longer upon the conduct of this boy in school. He became so quarrelsome and disagreeable that no one was willing to sit next to him. He was always spoken of as the worst boy in school.

Mr. Spicer was now his teacher, and he had borne with him till he could bear with him no longer. He had pretty much made up his mind that he would turn him out of his school. Before doing that, however, he was desirous of knowing the minds of his scholars. He called the school to order, and then told Charles what he had thought of doing; reminded him of his disobedience, of his unkindness to his school-mates, and of his general neglect of his studies. He told him if he did not do differently he would grow up without friends, and, in all probability, in consequence of his sins, come down to an early grave.

Mr. Spicer then addressed the scholars, and said, "All of you who think Charles Duran ought to be expelled from the school for continued bad conduct, raise your right hands." In a moment every right hand was raised up!

Then Mr. Spicer said, in a solemn and affecting manner, "*Charles Duran, with the voice of all your school-mates, you are expelled from this school, for bad conduct.*"

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CHAPTER V.

CHARLES'S HABITS.

Good habits are of the greatest importance. If they are cultivated by the young, they become fixed and permanent. Evil habits, unless they are corrected, will increase in number and strength. The young should beware of the first evil habit. A boy does not become a bad boy all at once: he gives way to one bad habit, and then to another. One small sin prepares the way for another and a greater one. Dr. Clarke says, "Sin is a small matter in its commencement; but by indulgence it grows great, and multiplies itself beyond all calculation." The old rabbins used to say it was like a spider's web at first, and that it increased till it was like a cart-rope. This is seen in the case of Charles Duran. His expulsion from school did not improve him: he grew up in the indulgence of his bad temper, and, instead of being a lovely, industrious boy, fond of his studies, and attentive to his various duties, he was idle, lazy, and vicious. When he ought to have been in school, he was fishing, and idling away his time along the margins of the brooks and rivers. He soon learned to use a gun, and much of his time was spent in the woods, hunting birds, squirrels, and rabbits. Idle habits are very dangerous. A boy or man that is habitually idle cannot be good,—mark that. The devil will always find mischief for such persons, and he will be very sure to get them into it.

[Illustration: *Charles hunting.*]

Charles had, what many boys desire, a gun, and was very fond of shooting. Besides shooting squirrels and birds, he would shoot at marks on his father's out-buildings and fences. There was not a door, not a board, not a post, and scarcely a rail, in all the out-buildings and fences, that was not full of shot-holes. This kind of shooting was a dangerous practice. I wondered, when I examined the premises, that the barn and sheds had not taken fire from the burning wads. It was dangerous also to the poultry and cattle. But he thought nothing of these things; from day to day it was shoot! shoot! shoot!

Pursuing this course, it is not strange that Charles should grow up rough in his manners, and coarse in his language. Gentleness is lovely always, wherever found; but it appears most lovely in children and youth. It indicates a good heart, and good training. It helps young persons into the best society, and secures them warm and valuable friends. Roughness of manner drives our friends from us, and prevents many from becoming friends. This fact is illustrated in the history of this spoiled boy. He might have had a large circle of friends, but now few, very few indeed, loved or esteemed him.

One vice does not long remain alone. Idleness begets vice. Viciousness shows itself in various forms: in lying, Sabbath-breaking, theft, swearing, and intemperance. Charles



grew worse and worse,—adding sin to sin. He became greatly addicted to swearing. He frequently spent the Sabbath in wandering about the fields, instead of attending church. He found, as the depraved always do, kindred spirits, with whom he associated. With these he learned to drink to excess, and was not unfrequently under the influence of strong drink.

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There is a standard in vice as well as in virtue. While some are held up as models of virtue, others may be regarded as the very personification of evil. We should learn to profit by both,—be encouraged by one, and warned by the other.

The unfortunate boy whose history I am detailing finally became a proverb in his native town. Good mothers often exhorted their children not to be like Charles Duran! Who of my little readers would like such a distinction as this? Try to live so that parents may point you out as good examples for their children to follow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATAL NIGHT.

In country villages, as well as in larger cities, parties often meet for dancing; and balls are frequently held, especially in the winter season. Many young people, whose thoughts and time are not better occupied, seem to derive a great deal of pleasure from such amusements.

These gatherings frequently embrace a large number of the young of both sexes, from the towns in which they are held, and often many from neighboring towns. They are usually held at some tavern where rum is sold. The parties arrive in the forepart of the evening, and the dance commences at eight, or from eight to nine o'clock, according to arrangement. Wine, cordials, and other stimulating drinks, are freely furnished, and freely used. Toward midnight, when chaste young ladies and sober young men should be at home, the ball-supper is served up. Rich viands and sparkling drinks are on the table. One becomes drunken, and another surfeited. The sound of the viol is again heard, and the merry dance is kept up till near morning light. The parties then gradually retire. Some of the young ladies, from over excitement in the ball-chamber, and subsequent exposure to the night air, take severe colds, become speedily consumptive, and from the place of rioting and mirth are carried to the grave! In this country, where consumption is so prevalent, and accomplishes its work so rapidly, the distance from the midnight ball-room to the grave is very short.

Most young men who attend balls go home inflamed with wine. I say *most* of them. It is not unfrequently the case, however, that some of them cannot get home. They have to stay behind until they have, in a measure, slept off the fumes of strong drink: and then, with bloodshot eyes, fetid breath, and staggering gait, they reach their homes. Such young men have received a new impetus in the way that leads to destruction, and such are the common fruits of a village ball.

Why do fathers and mothers,—and some of them professedly Christian parents, too,—allow their daughters to mingle in these scenes, and expose themselves to the

contaminating influence of such associations? How any well-disposed *mother* can do this I am at a loss to determine.

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Such a ball as I have described was to be held in the town of ——. Young men and young ladies impatiently waited for the time appointed to arrive. Among those who designed to attend this ball was Charles Duran, then in his eighteenth year.

Notwithstanding his habits and character, the position and respectability of his parents prevented him from being entirely excluded from society. He was still further aided in gaining admission to such parties by always having money. While some despised him in their heart, they were quite willing, for the sake of his purse, to have him in their company.

The anxiously looked for day arrived. The preparations were made. At night the ball was to come off. After dinner, Charles asked his father for money to bear the expenses of the evening. Mr. Duran gave him what he thought would be sufficient for the occasion. The amount did not satisfy him: more was asked. It was refused; and Charles, not having forgotten his early habits, immediately went into a fit of rage. More money he wanted, and more he would have. He went out, and arming himself with stones and blocks, soon commenced a regular assault upon the house. The weather-boards were battered, one window was smashed in, panes in the others were broken, and the fragments rattled on the floor and on the ground. The aged parents trembled for their safety; while the son, raving as a madman, seemed bent on their destruction. Stooping somewhat with age, and in great fear, Mr. Duran went to the door, with a bag in his hand, containing a quantity of specie:—

“Here, Charles,” said the feeble old man, “come and get what money you want, and don’t stone the house any more.”

Thus appeased, the demon became quiet. Charles helped himself to as much money as he wanted, and was ready for the ball in the evening. Alas, what degradation for a parent! and what persevering depravity in a son!

[Illustration: *Charles taking money for the ball.*]

The evening came. Parties began to assemble. Arrangements had been made for a great ball. The saloon was tastefully decorated. The kitchen gave evidence that a sumptuous repast was in preparation. The bar was fully supplied with all kinds of sparkling liquors. As the new-comers arrived, they met a smiling host, an attentive and ready bar-tender, and obsequious waiters and servants.

Fancy the scene. Groups of persons, gayly dressed, are in conversation in different parts of the ball-chamber. More are constantly coming in. The musicians, who for some time have been tuning their instruments, enter, and take their place. Partners are selected, the circle is formed, and the dancing begins. A scene of hilarity ensues. During the intervals, the merry laugh is heard, wine is drunk, and the glee becomes general. Sparkling eyes are made more sparkling by strong drink; and, under the influence of multiplied potations, the coarse jest is now and

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then uttered. In this scene of gayety and mirth Charles Duran mingled,—a prominent actor. A young and inexperienced girl had accompanied him to the place. Round and round went the dance, and round and round went Charles's head. He was flush with money, and many a friend did he treat at the bar. Long ere the festivities closed he was unable to walk steadily. Still, stimulated by the excitement of the occasion, and urged on by unprincipled comrades, he poured down the deadly poison. His brain reeled under its influence. He alternately roared and laughed as a maniac. "Another drink! another drink!" he said. His youthful system could endure it no longer: he uttered a moaning, sepulchral groan, and sunk to the floor!

The ball was over, and the night was nearly gone. A friend took charge of the thoughtless young girl that had accompanied Charles to the dance. Two young men, his companions in riot, undertook to convey him to his father's house. The stars were just beginning to fade away as they reached the threshold. Speechless, and almost lifeless, they laid him upon his bed. *It proved his death-bed!*

CHAPTER VII.

SICKNESS AND DEATH.

The debauch of the previous night laid the foundation of disease, from which Charles never recovered. On the following day he seemed at times wild, and partially deranged. A violent fever set in, and for many days he was confined to his bed. His sufferings were extreme; so high did his fever rise that it seemed as though the fire within would consume him. His physician watched the progress of his disease, and did all in his power to restore his health. The fever ran its course, and the crisis came. There was a change for the better. It was thought that he would get up. The hopes of his parents were revived; and many were the wishes that, with restored health, there might be a reformation of manners. Of this, however, there was little prospect.

These hopes of a recovery were soon cut off. Charles's disease assumed a new form. He was taken with a cough, and night-sweats followed. His eyes were a little sunken, but full of expression. His countenance was pale, and, slightly tinged with blue, gave evidence that consumption had marked him for its victim, and that the grave must soon swallow him up: he was rapidly sinking into the arms of death.

Toward the latter part of his sickness, a rude contrivance was adopted to change his position in bed. Two hooks were driven into the ceiling, over the foot of the bedstead. To these pulleys were attached. These pulleys were rigged with cords, one end of which was made fast to the upper part of the bed. By hoisting on these cords he could

be raised to any desired angle; and, instead of being bolstered up, he hung as if in a hammock. [See Frontispiece.]

During his illness Charles gave little evidence of any change in his feelings. No sorrow was expressed for anything in his past conduct. He was still fretful, still obstinate. He appeared like one early sold to sin.

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The minister of the parish came in to pray with him. He found him ignorant of spiritual things. He talked to him on the subject of religion,—urged him to prepare to meet God. He offered prayer by his bed-side. He left him, however, showing very little evidence of penitence, and entertaining for him very little hope.

Charles lingered along till early in March. The day of his departure came. The father and mother bent over his bed: they saw that the hopes which they entertained at his birth were now to perish. Instead of his closing their eyes in death, they were now to perform that office for him. He spoke not. Oppressive stillness reigned in the room. Not a sound was heard, save the rattling in the throat of the dying youth. The last breath was drawn; life, for a moment, quivered upon his lip. The spirit took its flight; and the poor mother, in anguish of soul, exclaimed, "*He is dead!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

Conclusion.

The way of transgressors is hard. Early did Charles Duran indulge in habits of disobedience,—early was he forgetful of God,—early did he run into the paths of vice and intemperance, and early did he go down to his grave.

Disobedience to parents is a fearful sin! Children think they know what is best for themselves. Parental restraint sometimes seems irksome to them; but God has wisely ordained that in our youth we should be under the instruction and control of our parents. Children, instead of feeling that parental control is oppressive to them, should learn to be thankful for it. It is enough for well-instructed and well-disposed children, generally, to know what the wishes of their parents are. Much of their happiness is derived from compliance with those wishes. The approbation of their parents will afford such children far more pleasure than all their forbidden indulgences.

The school history of Charles Duran will not fail, I trust, to make a suitable impression upon the minds of my youthful readers. Scholars sometimes think that it is not a great offense for them to violate the rules of their school, neglect their books, or be unkind even to some of their school-associates. So this boy thought. The result of his course is before us. All such children should know that by such a course of conduct they are laying the foundation for a bad character. They may, for awhile, escape punishment; they may not be expelled from school; they may possibly retain their places in their class; but they are acquiring those habits which, if not corrected, will bring ruin upon them by and by.

This boy's sporting habits ought not to be lightly passed over. He was exceedingly fond of a gun. The indulgence of this passion led him into habits of idleness and cruelty. Boys should rarely, if ever, be allowed the use of fire-arms: they are always dangerous.

The habits and associations to which their use leads are generally objectionable. Boys that are constantly around the brooks after little fishes, and in the woods in pursuit of little birds, had better be at their books. We always fear that idle boys will make idle men.

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We see from the history of Charles Duran the importance of early religious training. Had his parents pursued a different course with him, he might have grown up to be a blessing to them, and a useful member of society: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it." Prov. xxii, 6.

When, O when will parents lay this to heart! How many fathers and mothers have been brought down to the grave with sorrow, by neglecting this important duty!

The history of Charles Duran is a warning to all boys who are inclined to indulge in Sabbath-breaking; to form bad associations; to tittle; or to visit places of improper amusement. See his dreadful end! Mark that fatal night! Remember that he had been preparing for that season of riot and debauch by previous indulgence. He came not to his wretched condition all at once. He was preparing for it in his early disobedience,—in his neglect of instruction,—in his unkindness to his school-mates,—in delighting to injure those who were smaller and weaker than himself,—in his idle sporting habits,—in the indulgence of his bad temper,—in ministering to his perverse will,—in his Sunday rambling,—in associating with the vile,—in his tippling habits,—and, finally, in throwing off all parental regard and restraint. He had now come to the verge of the whirlpool of destruction, and, in a frenzied moment, he threw himself into the awful vortex! *Beware of the first sin!* "Enter not into the paths of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." Prov. iv, 14, 15.

THE END.

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