THE FIRST FALSE STEP; A POEM

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JAMES CARGILL GUTHRIE

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THE

FIRST FALSE STEP.

A Poem.

BY

JAMES CARGILL GUTHRIE,

AUTHOR OF "VILLAGE SONNETS."

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TO

HIS GRACE

GEORGE-DOUGLAS,

DUKE OF ARGYLL,

ETC., ETC.,

PRESIDENT OF THE SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION FOR SUPPRESSING DRUNKENNESS,

THIS POEM,

On the Evil Effects of Intemperance,

IS INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

LOOKING from one point of view, the Capital of the north has been, not unjustly, styled a "City of Palaces;" from another point of view, a "City of Hospitals;" while, with universal consent, she has been proclaimed "The Modern Athens." In another phase we shall now behold her, from which point of view we are afraid the fittest and most truthful appellation must be—The City of Wretchedness.

Let us suppose that an intelligent stranger has been attracted from afar to visit our renowned and beautiful city. On a bright

summer day his vessel breasts the dark green waves of the estuary of the Forth. Everything on which the eye can rest—the noble bay with its shipping, the river with its green and rocky islands, the white shelving rocks and surrounding mountains, the towers and battlements of the distant city, — are gorgeously, nay, surpassingly beautiful. Welcomed by some philanthropic friend to Dun-Edin's classic shore, he surveys with wonder and delight the many stately and magnificent structures of exquisite beauty which everywhere greet the eye; and, ascending some lofty eminence, the "City of Palaces," with its spacious streets and squares—its gardens, its monuments, its lordly domes and glittering spires, lies in surpassing glory and loveliness at his feet; while the wide-spreading bay, hemmed in by undulating hills, green and beautiful

to their summits, lies in calm and peaceful beauty beyond. His charming reverie is, however, interrupted by an invitation from his friend to view the more ancient parts of the city; and, descending the Castle-Hill, he pursues his way along the Canongates and Cowgates, with their dark and dismal "wynds"—entering this abode of misery and disease, and that hovel of wretchedness and crime; until, sick at heart at these novel and hitherto unheard-of sights, and scenes, and sounds, he again gratefully breathes the fresh air of heaven on his way to the lordly mansion of his friend in another quarter of the city.

After partaking of the most sumptuous hospitality, we now find him in the gorgeous drawing-room, surrounded by the fairest and loveliest of our land. Rich and exquisite music charms his ear; high intellectual con-

verse pleases and delights his heart. Still his thoughts involuntarily revert to the sad scenes he had so lately witnessed. Let us suppose, then, he takes advantage of one of those pauses which sometimes occur even in the most polished circles, and describes with truthful and graphic power the sights and scenes he so lately beheld, will it be believed that the great majority, if not nearly all, of that gay and brilliant throng, will listen to his soul-stirring description, as if it were some highly coloured tale of the dismal sights and scenes of other and distant lands? Yet, sad and humiliating as the confession undoubtedly is, it is nevertheless true, that the great proportion of the upper classes of society amongst us are absolutely and entirely ignorant that such revolting scenes can every day be witnessed in all their aggravated heinousness and hideous