

Literature, &c.

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WHAT SHALL I DO?

A TEMPERANCE TALE.

By T. S. Arthur.

"You won't go out this stormy evening," Mrs Merrill said to her husband, who had commenced putting on his overcoat.

"If I can do any good, I shall not care for the rain," Mr Merrill replied, cheerfully, as he buttoned his coat close up under his chin.

"But the wind drives the rain so. You'll be wet through."

"No matter. I am neither butter nor salt," smilingly returned the husband. "Don't you remember that it was just such a night as this, two years ago, that a good Samaritan picked me up in the street, and took me to Union Hall?"

The tears were glistening in the eyes of the wife as she replied,

"Go, Harry, if you think you can do any good. I should be the last to object."

"Mr Merrill kissed tenderly the cheek of his wife, who was still in the bloom of young womanhood, and then taking his hat and cane went forth. It was indeed a stormy night. The wind came rushing along with a dismal howl, and the rain fell heavily. But few persons were in the street, and they were hurrying homeward, anxious to escape the war of elements.

"The storm is heavy, sure enough. I shall not find many at the Hall," Merrill said, half aloud, as he walked quietly along. His way was through a part of the town inhabited by persons of the poorer class. In almost every block of this section were to be found one or two little taverns, with either a glaring red curtain, or an inviting transparent sign, telling of the good cheer within.—From many of these was heard the loud laugh, or the bacchanalian song, and, as they fell upon the ears of Merrill, he sighed for his infatuated fellow men, who sought brief and exciting sensual pleasures, at the expense of health, character, and happiness. Sometimes he would pause, half tempted to go in among them, and beseech them to stop in their career of folly ere it was too late.—But the recollection of several fruitless efforts of the kind, caused him to forbear.

Just about the time that Merrill left his house a little scene was passing in a humble tenement, that stood directly in his way to Union Hall, whither he was going. To a spectator acquainted with all the circumstances, that scene would have been a very affecting one. There was a sick child upon the bed, and the father and mother standing beside it. The mother looked anxious and careworn, the father's face had a troubled expression. All around indicated poverty.

"Her fever is much higher. It has increased rapidly during the last hour," said the mother looking earnestly into her husband's face.

"Haden't I better go for Doctor R—?"

"Hetty is very sick. But we haven't settled the last bill yet, and I don't like to see Doctor R— until that is paid."

The husband said nothing in reply to this, but stood looking down upon his sick child, with something stupid in his gaze. At length the young sufferer began to toss about, and moan, and show painful symptoms of internal distress.

"I am afraid she's dangerous," murmured the mother.

"I will go for the doctor. We cannot see our child die even if his bill is not paid." As the father said this, he took up his hat, and moved towards the door.

"It storms dreadfully, James, and we have no umbrella."

The wife laid her hand upon her husband's arm, and spoke earnestly.

"No matter. I'm not afraid of the rain. I've stood many a worse night than this."

"Suppose you wait awhile, James. Perhaps she will be better." And the wife's hand still rested on her husband's arm. "I don't like to have you go out."

"O, that's nothing. I don't care for the rain. Hetty is very ill, and we ought to call in the doctor by all means."

Seeing that he was in earnest about going, she said, looking with a tender, half-imploving expression in his face—

"You'll come right back again, James?"

"Certainly I will. Dye think I'd remain away, and Hetty so sick?"

"Well, do come home as quick as you can. And don't stop any where, will you?"

"No—no. Never fear."

And he went out, leaving the mother alone with her sick child.

Without pausing an instant, he pursued his way steadily along, bowing his head to the pelting storm, and sometimes cringing, as the fierce gust drove suddenly against him. In about ten minutes he reached the doctor's office, and found him absent, but expected in momentarily. He sat down, dripping with wet, to await his return; but soon grew restless.

"I'll come back in a few minutes," he at length said to the attendant, rising and going out. Again on the street, he seemed irresolute. At first he stood thoughtfully, and then moved on a few paces. There was evidently a struggle going on in his mind. Some propensity was pleading hard for indulgence, while reason was arguing strongly on the other side. The debate continued for some time, he walking on for a short distance, and then stopping to reflect until he found himself in front of a small tavern, with a tempting display of liquors in the window.

"I'll just take one glass, and no more," he said to himself.

"But you know if you touch a drop, you will never leave that house sober," spoke a voice within his own bosom.

This made him hesitate. But a depraved appetite urged him on to self-indulgence, and he was about placing his hand upon the door to enter, when the image of his sick child came up before him so vividly that he started back, uttering aloud, in the sad consciousness of inability to struggle against the fierce thirst that was overpowering him—

"What shall I do?"

As he said this, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a voice said—

"Sign the pledge."

The man turned in surprise. Our friend Merrill stood before him.

"Come with me, and I'll tell you what to do," he said, in a cheerful, encouraging voice.

"It's no use, I cannot keep it," was despondingly answered.

"But you can keep it. I'll go bound for that. Hundreds, nay, thousands, have done so, and I am sure you will not be the only exception. So come along, I'm just on my way to Union Hall, and have the pledge book here under my arm."

My child is sick, and I must go for the doctor."

"What doctor?"

"Doctor R—."

"Just in the way. It won't take you three minutes."

"If I thought there was any use in it.—But I've tried to reform too many times. I can't do it. I'm afraid I am too far gone.—Heaven help me! What shall I do?"

There was something very desponding in the man's voice, as he spoke.

"Don't listen for a moment to such suggestions, returned Merrill. 'They are from an enemy. If you have tried to reform and failed in the attempt, it is because you have not tried in the right way.'

He had already drawn his arm within that of the poor desponding drunkard, and they were walking away from the charmed spot that had well nigh proved fatal to a wavering resolution.

"Last Tuesday night, Merrill went on to say, 'no less than twenty signed the pledge, and at least five of them were more deeply enslaved than I can believe you to be. We found them in the street, and brought them in, and now they are sober men, and still remain so. It appears like a miracle, but we have seen hundreds and hundreds of such miracles. They are occurring every day.'

By this time they had reached the Hall, and Merrill, pausing, said,

"This is the place. Come in with me and sign the pledge, and you are safe."

But the man held back. The thought of giving up his liberty—of binding himself down by a solemn pledge, not even to taste a drop of the pleasant drink that was so sweet to his lips, made him hesitate. The pleadings of appetite for a little more indulgence was strong.

"You are tee-totalers?" he at length said.

"Certainly. Our pledge covers the whole ground," Merrill replied. "For such as you there is no hope but in total abstinence. Do you think it possible for you to drink a glass of wine, beer, or cider, without having your desire for stronger liquors so excited as to render your further abstinence impossible? Think! Have you never tried to 'regulate' yourself?"

"O yes. Many and many a time."

"You have tried two glasses of beer a day."

"Yes."

"And before three days you were intoxicated?"

"It is, alas, too true. Sometimes, in an hour after I took the first glass of beer."

"Then it must be total abstinence, or nothing. In this lies your only ground of safety. Come then, and put your hand to the pledge that makes you a free man. Come! The rain is drenching us to the skin while we stand here. Come, sign at once, and go home with medicine for your child and joy for the heart of your poor wife. Come, my friend. Now is the great turning point in your life. Health, prosperity, and happiness are welcoming you with smiles on one side, sickness, poverty, and wretchedness are on the other. Just two years ago I stood on this very spot, urged as I am now urging you to sign; I yielded at last, and have been prospering ever since. I have plenty at home, and plenty with content. Before, all was wretchedness. Come then, my friend—come with us, and we will do thee good!"

"Yes, come," said a third person, pausing at the door of Union Hall, just at the moment and taking hold of the poor man's arm.

The slight impulse of the hand upon his arm, decided his wavering resolution. He went in with them, and going up between them to the secretary's desk, put his hand to the pledge.

"There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety nine just persons that need no repentance," said the president of the meeting in a serious voice. "My friend, you have all Heaven on your side, for Heaven is on the side of good resolutions. Look up and be strong. They that are for you are more than all who are against you."

A thrill of pleasure ran through the soul of the redeemed inebriate, such as he had not known for a long, long time. He left the Hall, feeling more like a man than he had felt for six years, and hurried away to the office of Doctor R—. The Doctor was in, but at first seemed little inclined to go out on so stormy a night, especially to visit the family of a man who drank up his earnings and neglected to pay his bills.

"I will call round in the morning," Simpson.

It rains too hard to-night."

"But my little girl is very sick. She might die before morning."

"No danger—I'll be round early."

"But doctor I wish you would see her to-night. We feel very much troubled."

"No doubt," the doctor returned, a little petulantly. "You are anxious enough to see me when anything is the matter, but as soon as all is straight again, I'm never thought of."

"But you shall be thought of, doctor. I know I have not treated you well, but hereafter you shall not have cause to complain."

"I don't know, Simpson. Men like you are always full of fair promises. But a sight of the next tavern makes you forget them all."

"I know—I know. But there'll be nothing more of that. See!" And he drew from his bosom a neatly folded paper and handed it to the doctor, who took it and glanced his eyes over its contents.

"Ha! What is this? A pledge?"

"Yes, doctor."

"When was this done?"

"To-night. Not ten minutes ago."

"Are you really in earnest, Simpson?"

"I feel like dying by that pledge. It was hard to take; but now that it is taken, I will never violate it. I feel that I can stand by it like a man."

"Go home, Simpson," replied Doctor R., in a changed voice, as he handed him back the pledge. "Go home, and tell your wife that I will be there in ten minutes. Good bye, and stand by your pledge."

"I will do it, doctor."

On his way home, Simpson did not notice a single one of the tempting red curtains, and bottles of liquor that filled so many windows. He thought only of his wife, and the heart he was about to make happy.

The joy that filled the bosom of the poor wife, who had begun sadly to fear that her poor husband, whose weakness she too well knew, had been tempted to take a glass on his way to the doctor's office, need not be described. It was deep, trembling, and full of thankfulness to Him who is the Great Restorer of all things to order from disorder. Even tho' her child remained ill thro' the night, she felt a warmth of joy in her heart such as she had not known for many years.

In a few weeks, everything about the dwelling and person of Simpson, became remarkably changed. He was a good workman, and could earn fair wages at his trade. Instead of idling half his time, and spending more than half of what he earned in drink, he worked all of his time, and placed in the hands of his prudent wife every dollar he earned. This accounted for the change.

Thus matters went on for nearly a year, when, the excitement of experience meetings, and other exerted means of keeping up an interest among the reformed men, and occupying their minds having subsided, Simpson began to feel restless and lonesome, and was often strongly tempted to drop in to some of his old places of resort, and pass an evening in good fellowship with former associates.

Such thoughts always produced a feverish state; for a contest would arise in his mind between the truth which he had obeyed for a year, and the specious but false reasonings of inclination, and the force of old habits not yet eradicated. The consequence was, that Simpson became unhappy. He wanted something to interest him—some excitement to keep him up. He had told his own experience, and heard others relate theirs, until he was tired. That was well enough for a time; but it would not satisfy always. He had never been fond of reading, and had not that resource of elevating and strengthening to his mind, lifting it up into the higher regions of intellectual thoughts, instead of leaving it to sink down amid the mere allurements of sense.

As this state of dissatisfaction increased, Simpson became really more and more unhappy. He wanted something to sustain him, something extra to his mere pledge. Deeply conscious that he was in imminent danger of falling, he became anxious, gloomy, and desponding.

One evening after sitting at home for an hour and reading over the newspaper of the day even to the advertisements, he took his hat and said—

"I believe I'll walk out for a little while; I feel so dull."

His wife looked up at him, and tried to smile. But she felt troubled, for she had noticed for some time that he was not altogether himself. What the cause was she did not really know. But a wife is never far wrong in her conjectures.

"You won't stay out long?" she merely said.

"O no, I shall be back in a little while—I only want to take a short walk."

When Simpson left his house, he walked away, with his eyes upon the pavement, undetermined where he should go. He had gone out merely because he felt restless to sit at home. Now that he was in the street, he was as dissatisfied as ever. Moving on with a slow measured tread, he had gone for the distance of two or three squares, when his ear caught the sound of music issuing from a noted drinking establishment, but a short distance ahead. Quickening his pace, he was soon in front of the house, when he paused to listen. The music was from a hand organ, the owner of which had been paid a certain sum by the proprietor of the tavern to play him a number of tunes as a means of drawing in customers. The plan succeeded to his entire satisfaction, and had likely to have succeeded in enticing Simpson within the charmed circle of his bar-room.—But, just as his hand was on the latch, his better sense came to his aid, and he tore himself away.

Walking on again, with head down, he felt still more wretched. The danger he had just escaped, made him fearfully aware of the danger that beset him on every side. So wrought up in mind did he become, under a sense of his condition, that shuddering from a vivid

picture of himself again an abandoned drunkard, which his imagination had conjured up, he stopped suddenly, and said, aloud,

"God help me! What shall I do?"

A hand was laid upon his shoulder, a voice that he had heard before, said, in a low, earnest voice—

"Simpson! Is it you? What is the matter now?"

It was Merrill, who had encountered Simpson just at a critical moment. Simpson had quickly when he felt the hand upon his shoulder, and looked into the face of the doctor half sternly.

"What ails you now, my friend?"

Merrill. "A good temperate man should never be in trouble of mind."

"You think so. Well, perhaps not."

"Your a good temperate man."

"I am not so sure of it."

"What!" In a quick surprised voice.

have not broken—"

"No, no. Not yet! But heaven only knows how soon I may do so. I am beset with temptations that it seems impossible for me to withstand."

"It was not so first."

"No. The excitement of meetinging concerns, and the relation of experience, cupied my mind. But these have died away, and I am thrown back upon myself again, weak, weak self. If I do not fall, it will be a miracle. I see every tavern I pass in the street, and think spite of all my efforts to keep things out of my mind, of the mixed feelings that would thrill upon my taste like which are there to be obtained. What do I feel as if evil spirits were leagued to destroy me, and that unless I receive more human strength, I will inevitably fall."

"And so you will," was the solemn reply.

"Merrill? Why do you speak so?"

son said, quickly. "You will drive me to destruction. I want encouragement, prophecy of ruin. You saved me once, not you do so again?"

"Do you remember what was said on the night you signed the pledge, by president?" asked Merrill.

"No. What was it?"

"Look up and be strong? They tell you for you are more than all who are against you."

"I had forgotten."

"You have not looked up then."

"How, up?"

"Up to Him who can alone give every good resolution: If you have been in your own strength, no wonder that you are on the eve of falling. External means and reasons of various kinds may reform a man for a time, but until he has his cause in the hands of the All-Powerful, is in imminent danger."

"But how shall I do this? I am a religious man."

"But you have refrained from drinking."

"Because it is a debasing vice; a vice if indulged, will beggar my family, as once already, done."

"You must abstain from a higher mean."

"Can there be a higher one?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"To refrain from doing an evil act, it is a sin against God, is a much higher and one that will give a striving power over all his enemies. You acknowledge a God?"

"O yes."

"And that he is ever present?"

"Yes."

"And a rewarder of them that diligently seek him?"

"So the Bible tells us."

"It is all true. Whatever power we have to oppose evil, is from Him. If we are ourselves, and claim the little strength we possess as our own, we will too soon find we are weakness itself. But, if we strive for all things from a religious principle—the acknowledgement that all we have is from the Lord, and in the endeavour to shun evil of life because it is a sin against him, we receive all the strength we need, no how deeply we may be tempted. For an hour, then, my friend, resolve to trust in Him who careth for you. This is the reformed man's only hope. The pledge is a mere external, temporary, that must be superseded by a deeply religious principle, or he will be every danger of falling. We must be supported by the centre, and not from the circumference. The pledge is a hoop, that is liable to break, but obedience to God is an attraction at the centre, holding in consistency all things that are arranged in order around it. Will you then look up?"

"I feel that it is my only hope."

"Take my solemn assurance that if you home, and carry with you this truth, that will strive to act from the higher motive given you, all will be right."

It was, perhaps, half an hour from time Simpson left his house, that he came face as he came in. But a first glance led the fears that had stolen over him before going to bed that night, Simpson the family Bible, and read a chapter of doing so, he felt a sweet tranquility in his mind such, as he had not experienced a long time. On the next day he tried to vary his thoughts to the Power above him, he wished to put his trust. He found it easier to do so than he had expected, not long before in addition to the reading chapter in the evening, before retiring, prayer was said. From that time, a religious sentiment took possession of the Simpson. Light broke in upon him.