

## OLD SI BROWN'S BOY

"What is your name?" asked the teacher.  
 "Tommy Brown, ma'am," answered the boy.

He was a pathetic little fellow, with thin face, hollow eyes and pale cheeks, that plainly told of insufficient food. He wore a suit of clothes evidently made for some one else—patched in places with cloth of different colors. His shoes were old. It was a bitter day, yet he wore no overcoat, and his bare hands were red with cold.

"How old are you, Tommy?"

"Nine years old come next April. I've learned to read at home and I can cipher a little."

"Well, it is time for you to begin school. Why have you never come before?"

The boy fumbled with a cap in his hands, and did not reply at once. It was a ragged cap with frayed edges, and the original color of the fabric no man could tell.

Presently he said, "I never went to school 'cause—well, mother takes in washin' an' she couldn't spare me. But Sissy is big enough now to help, an' she minds the baby besides."

It was not quite time for school to begin. Around the teacher and the new scholar stood boys that belonged to the room.

While he was making his confused explanation, some of the boys laughed, and one of them called out, "Say, Tommy, where is your collar?" And another sang out, "You must sleep in the rag-bag at night by the looks of your clothes!" Before the teacher could quiet them, another boy had volunteered the information that the father of the boy was "old Si Brown, who is always drunk as a fiddler."

The poor child looked around on his tormentors like a hunted thing. Then, before the teacher could stop him, with a suppressed cry of misery he ran out of the room, out of the building, down the street and was seen no more.

The teacher went to her duties with a troubled face. All day long the child's pitiful face haunted her. She could not rid herself of the memory of it. After a little trouble she found the place where he lived, and then two kind ladies went to visit him.

It was a dilapidated house. When they first entered they could scarcely discern objects, the room was so filled with steam of soap-suds. There were two windows, but a tall brick building adjacent shut out the light. It was a gloomy day, too, with grav, lowering clouds that forbade even the memory of sunshine.

A woman stood before a wash-tub. When they entered, she wiped her hands on her apron and came forward to meet them.

Once she had been pretty, but the color had gone out of her face, leaving only sharpened outlines and haggardness of expression.

She asked them to sit down; then taking a chair herself, she said: "Sissy, give me the baby."

A little girl came forward from a dark corner of the room, carrying a baby that she laid in its mother's lap, a lean, sickly-looking baby with the same hollow eyes that Tommy had.

"Your baby doesn't look strong," said one of the ladies.

"No, ma'am. I ain't very well, and I expect it affects her."

"Where is your little Tommy?" asked one of the visitors.

"He is in there in the trundle-bed," replied the mother.

"Is he ill?" inquired the lady.

"Yes'm, and the doctor thinks he isn't going to get well." At this the tears ran down her thin and faded cheeks.

"What is the matter with him?"

"He was never very strong, and he's had to work too hard, carrying water and helping me lift the wash-tubs, and things like that. Of late he has been crazy to go to school. I never could spare him till this winter. He thought if he could get a little education he'd be able to take care of Sissy and baby and me. So I fixed up his clothes as well as I could, and last week he started. I was afraid the boys would laugh at him, but he thought he could stand it if they did. I stood at the door and watched him going."

"I can never forget how the little fellow looked," she continued, the tears streaming down her face. "His patched-up clothes, his poor little anxious look. He turned around to me as he left the yard, and said, 'Don't worry, mother, I won't mind what the boys say.' But he did mind. It wasn't an hour before he was back again. I believe the child's heart was just broke. I thought mine was broke years ago. If it was, it was broken over again that day. I can stand most anything myself, but oh! I can't bear to see my children suffer." Here she broke down in a fit of convulsive weeping. The little girl came up to her quietly and stole a thin little arm around her mother's neck. "Don't cry, mother," she whispered; "don't cry."

The woman made an effort to dry her tears, and she wiped her eyes. As soon as she could speak with any degree of calmness, she continued:

"Poor little Tommy cried all day; I couldn't comfort him. He said it was no use to do anything. Folk would only laugh at him for being a drunkard's boy. I tried to comfort him before my husband came home. I told him his father would be mad if he saw him crying. But it wasn't any use. Seemed like he could not stop. His father came and saw him. He wouldn't have done it if he hadn't been drinking. He ain't a bad man when he is sober. I hate to tell it, but he whipped Tommy, and the child fell and struck his head. I suppose he'd a' been sick anyway. But oh! my poor boy! My poor suffering child!" she cried. "How can they let men sell stuff that makes the innocent suffer so?"

One of the ladies went to the bed. There he lay, poor little defenseless victim. He lived in a Christian land, in a country that takes great care to pass laws to protect sheep, and diligently legislates over its game. Would that the children were as precious as brutes and birds! Would that the law was more jealous of little waifs' rights!

His face was flushed and the hollow eyes were bright. There was a long purple mark on his temple. He put up one little wasted hand to cover it, while he said, "Father wouldn't have done it if he hadn't been drinking." Then in his queer, piping voice, weak with sickness, he half whispered, "I'm glad I'm going to die. I'm too weak ever to help mother anyhow. Up in heaven the angels ain't going to call me the drunkard's child and make fun of my clothes. And maybe, if I'm right up there where God is, I can keep reminding Him of mother, and He will make it easier for her."

He turned his head feebly on his pillow, and then said, in a low tone, "Some day—they ain't goin'—to let—saloons open. But

I'm afraid—poor father—will be dead—before then." Then he shut his eyes.

The next morning the sun shone in on the still, cold face of little Tommy, killed by the votes of church-members who were better party men than Christians.—Selected.

## THE NEW FIRE

The following article was written by Frank Beaver, a Winnebago Indian, an elder in the Reformed Church of America, and a leader of his people:

"Winnebago Indian traditions say that the members of the Thunderbird clan are the hereditary chiefs of the tribe. Being offspring of the Thunderbird, they have the natural possession and keeping of the art of lighting fire. As the Thunderbird strikes fire and lightning, it became the sacred duty of this particular clan to light the first tribal fire. In the beginning, when the chief set ablaze the first fire, it brought warmth, light and joy into the hearts of all. As the fire stands in the center of every dwelling, Indian life centered around the fireplace. It is spoken of, even to this day, as the Winnebago Fireplace, which really implies community center.

"The fire is regarded as a sacred witness, and the children are so taught that they are ever conscious of living in a sacred presence. The fire was also the medium through which the Red Man worshipped the spirit world. He would first address the fire, very reverently, as the bearer of all petitions; then he would place his sacrificial tobacco upon the live coals and then pray. As the tide of civilization came, the old fireplace became dimmer and dimmer until there is left only the dead ashes which speak of a life that has been. The old fire chiefs—the light bearers—are rapidly vanishing and the question arises, Who shall light a new fire? Who shall deliver us from the darkness?"

"Just when it seems hopeless, a new day begins to break, for there comes a new clan, a peculiar people bearing a new light and a goodly message which is for all people. They speak of Him who was born across the sea, a true Light around which all races center—a Mediator, a living Way that leads to the very throne of the Great Spirit. Give us more of this true Light; then upon the dead ashes of our old fireplace will burn the fire that brings joy, peace and life forever."—Selected.

## WHEN THE LEAVES ARE GONE

One writes of watching an old tree in the autumn, as the leaves were touched by the frosts, and fell off when the rough winds blew. As the tree at last became bare he saw a bird's nest on one of the branches. Through the summer day the nest had been hidden beneath the thick foliage, but the blasts of winter which swept away the leaves uncovered this home and shelter of the birds.

So, oft times, is it in the history of God's children. In their prosperity we see not their refuge, which is hidden beneath the leaves of worldly prosperity. But when adversity comes, taking away earthly beauty, stripping off the bright foliage, their true and eternal refuge in God is disclosed. The storms of earth should only drive them back into God's bosom.—From "The Hidden Life," by J. R. Miller.

The church is a recruiting station from which men should go out to fight the battles of the Lord; not a hospital in which to live idly upon his pension.—Presbyterian Record.