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THE LAST PLEDGE, OR, THE WEDDING RING.

BY MRS. C. LADD.

FLIES from the bright and sparkling bowl, throw far the tempter from thy hand, its touch leaves but the foul plague spot, that sweeps its millions from our land.

thought—the Society was a new thing in the place—she knew nothing of its beneficial effects, and therefore did not wish to lose the company of her husband one, or perhaps two evenings in a week, for the mere hope of reforming a parcel of drunken men, that neither she nor her husband knew anything about.

ALMOST two years had passed away since Louisa Benson had become the wife of young Henry; a little boy, but a few months old set on her knee;—need I say she was happy—as she caressed and kissed the little dimpled cheek that was turned up to her; though he slept, a smile ever and anon played around the mouth, particularly when the lips of the mother gently touched his cheek, that might well make one believe in the old Irish tradition, of children seeing and conversing with angels, when they smiled in their sleep.

Henry and George Bennett had entered the counting-house of Messrs. Mount & Co. together; they had been as brothers, and Henry, for the first time—the day after being alone with Bennett. He felt how hard it was to refuse so simple a request from his early friend.

The table was neatly spread for supper, which had evidently been waiting some time. Mrs. Henry at length arose, and laying down the babe, walked to the street window to watch for Mr. Henry, but her vigils were not long, in a few moments a step was heard on the pavement, and Joseph Henry with a light heart and a lighter step, almost bounded through the passage.

His resolutions were of too short a duration to be even put into effect; and finally, believing he could be better if away, he sold the little that was left, and with his uncomplaining wife and two children, he left his native city, for the bustling and busy metropolis of our Southern world.

"Don't scold, Louisa! I have been detained late; but let me sit down to supper, I will tell you something; a new society is about to be formed in our town—but first a kiss from little Joe, and the happy young father bent over his boy, proud as a king of his treasure.

"Well, Henry, I hope you may never think otherwise. You have a wife, and the charms of home may keep you from mingling with those, who might, perhaps, induce you to taste too freely of the wine-cup. I have no home but the hotel.

"I plead guilty, Louisa, but we were all detained rather late to-night at the counting-house; the firm has done a fine business to-day, and by the by, I will have to go back to-night, to finish packing some goods, and assist in making out the bills.

Louisa could see that her husband was indulging too freely in the wine cup—and once or twice he had returned home sufficiently under the influence of liquor, to make the wife and mother dread the future. Mrs. Henry now mentally wished that she had urged, instead of opposing his joining the Sons of Temperance; but who could have foreseen such an issue.

"Ah! curiosity!—well it is nothing more nor less than the establishment of a Lodge, by the Sons of Temperance. Two of the clerks in the store intend joining to-morrow night, and they were persuading me to become a member also. Of course I thought it right to consult with you about it, before promising, and have your opinion about the use of such a society."

"Indeed, Joseph, I see no use in any such societies, except for drunkards; you never drink, and I would consider it an insult for a person to ask me to join any such a society."

"But the society, Joseph!"

"By the by," said Mrs. Henry to her husband, in as careless a manner as she could assume—"how comes on the Society? I think I would like you to join. I believe all the clerks in the establishment belong to it, except yourself, so do tell Mr. Bennett you will make one of the number."

"I am satisfied," said the Englishman, sheathing his sword, "thou art satisfied, he is satisfied; we are satisfied, you are satisfied, they are satisfied."

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indulging too freely, would at once be acknowledging that he had not moral courage sufficient to restrain himself, and needed the trammels of the pledge, to bind him to his new-born resolution, for he had made a firm resolve in his mind, as he wended his way to the store, not to touch the wine cup again; then in two or three months, or after his friends had seen that he had firmness of character sufficient to restrain himself, he would join the Society, but not till then.

It is useless to follow the downfall of man, or mark his course from virtue to vice, in some cases the descent is rapid,—but generally it is almost by imperceptible degrees. The first step has been made from the top of the hill, every step but accelerates his motion, and ere he becomes conscious of his danger, that motion has increased beyond his power of stopping. How seldom does man stop halfway in his career of vice; never, till the bottom of the hill is reached, will he attempt to look back, or strive to ascend to the point from which he had fallen.

Eight years had flown away since the commencement of our narrative, and Henry was discharged from the firm that he had been employed in from a boy. He had staggered the streets, and shame was gone. He considered himself an injured man, and flung back in defiance, all words of warning and remonstrance from the few friends he had left. Debts accumulated—sunshine friends deserted—and Henry, the once happy and respected man, was a common drunkard. Fortunately, they had but two children, the youngest a fair-haired girl of but three summers. The wretched mother saw nothing before her but hopeless misery. Henry would not ask for employment, for fear he might be again refused, and the man who could be seen nightly in the lowest haunts where the stimulating poison could be obtained, talked of his pride, and a determination not to stoop to solicit employment. Sometimes the better feelings of Mr. Henry's nature were aroused—then but for that false pride, which so often over-ruled his better feelings, he would have sought employment in the course of vice, he friend, Bennett—acknowledged his weakness and irresolution, and with his aid try to regain the confidence of his early associates.

His resolutions were of too short a duration to be even put into effect; and finally, believing he could be better if away, he sold the little that was left, and with his uncomplaining wife and two children, he left his native city, for the bustling and busy metropolis of our Southern world. A wretched hovel in the outskirts of the city soon became the home of Louisa Henry and her children—matters became worse and worse—Mr. Henry soon gave up, as difficulties began to increase. Mrs. Henry being an utter stranger, knew not where to apply for work—day after day the little money they had was rapidly decreasing. Whole days, and sometimes half the nights were spent in the low haunts of that noted city; every noble and manly feeling in the breast of Henry seemed dead—he was desperate. The look of wretchedness, but uncomplaining agony on the face of his wife, the wasted and meagre forms of his once beautiful and joyous children were unheeded—he was desperate. Their scanty store of furniture was pawned, and even the most of that found its way to the retailer of the scourge of our land.

Henry had left his home with the last remaining article, except the scanty clothes wrapped around them; he promised to buy food—not a crust was in the hovel, but the night wore on—he came not;—then the day went slowly by, for time flies rapid only with the gay and light of heart. The piteous and plaintive appeal of her boy and girl for bread fell on her ear like the knell of the doomed.

The shades of night had begun to wrap all nature in its gloom—still Henry sat like one paralyzed. Her children had crouched down on a little straw, and wept themselves to sleep. Must they starve! must they again hear their appeals for bread!—The thought was madness. She sprang to her feet—while they slept she would beg—yes beg! She could not see her children perish with hunger—their father had left them to starve. Who can tell the agony of that moment! who that has not known or seen it, can tell the utter wretchedness and misery endured by the wife of the drunkard. Yes, that father had left them to starve—that father, who before he had given himself up to the demon of intemperance, would have sacrificed his life for the little beings who were in reality starving; that he might indulge his insatiable appetite.

With a bound Mrs. Henry sprang to the door. If there was a heart in the city alive to the voice of suffering, she would be heard. Bread she must have, no matter how lowly she supplicated for the scanty pittance of charity.

As she opened the door, Henry reached it. He was sober, for he had not touched cent left to purchase a drop of the liquid fire. There was a haggard look on his face; with returning reason he remembered that he had left home the night before to purchase food—the last thing was pawned—the money gone and no food. He began to feel the rapid gnawings of hunger—mechanically he turned his steps homeward. He was sober, reader, yes, sober, and thoughts were busy.

He thought of the children who were perishing, but he did not mean it—no, he only intended to take one drink—yes, one drink only; then purchase food and return, that first drink was all his confused brain could remember. The night was gone—so was the small sum he had received, credit he had none, and after wondering some hours about—ly gathered courage enough to seek those he had so cruelly neglected. He had halted at the threshold to listen if he could hear what was passing within, when the door was opened by his almost frantic wife.

Henry, my husband;—thank God you have come; say, say have you brought them bread?—they are starving. My children have not tasted food since yesterday at noon I am not hungry—misery has taken away the cravings of nature, but do not let them starve!—she could say no more.

The horror of that hour, whose portrait the full tide of their wretchedness swept over him, it came like the mighty rush of the cataract—he was bowed to the earth, crushed and humbled—he could not speak, the pleading and wild look of his wife was upon him, he was to add to his other sins a murderer, they were dying, dying for food, and he had done the deed.

Could not curse me Louisa, was all he could utter as she sank by her side. "Never," she murmured, "but my brain is almost on fire—save them if you can—then a sudden thought sprang in her mind—yes, we can get relief for this one night—my ring, my wedding ring—'tis heavy—here she exclaimed, drawing it from her finger—quick ere they awake—another moan—another cry for bread. "Oh my husband will drive me mad. She saw Henry was cool and false she could trust him."

Henry moved not till the ring was a second time with eagerness extended. "Never Louisa, never will I part with the last link that seems to bind me to you. I will beg to-night and pass for a look so hard on me. My wife this time I will not deceive you, one long hour at farthest I will return with relief." He rushed from the door and the miserable wife did not hear the concluding words, "or never return."

Henry rather flew than walked till he reached the more crowded parts of the city; he had formed no definite purpose till the broad glare of lights streaming from the St. Charles Hotel—roused him to the full horrors of his situation. The supplicating look of his wife was before him.—The cries of his children and the word "food" seemed to be echoed around him by ten thousand voices.

A group of gentlemen are at the door. He must beg—yes, Joseph Henry was a beggar. He approached them—one face—once voice arrested his attention—with a wild scream of joy, he sprang past the astonished group. "Bennett!" he exclaimed, his feelings had been wrought to the highest pitch. The sight of his early and long tried friend, brought a relaxation—he could say no more, but sank exhausted on the pavement.

Bennett had recognised in the squalled and almost ragged man, the features of Henry. Aid was immediately procured and he was conveyed to Mr. Bennett's room.

As soon as the exhausted Henry could speak, he made known his situation. One year and a half only had elapsed since he had started from the home of his youth, but that had been fraught with enough of misery to his family, to have served for a long life time.

back, and the happy face of Uncle Bennett as the children call him, help to enlighten the cheerful fire side; he boards with his friend Henry, and likely so to do; though an old bachelor, no kinder heart could be found throughout the vast city.

"I am not a member of the church, why should I seek to become a member of a more inferior Society."

"True my dear sir—but, because you can, and have entered the Holy of Holies, would you scorn to be seen, in any of the vestibules leading to that sacred place. You would not now pick up the drunkard from the streets and usher him into that beautiful tabernacle of God the church. The Sons of Temperance must first take him up, they can try him and if any remnant of the noble nature of man is left—they will arouse it, then you have a subject to listen to your voice, when it preaches of redemption through a saviour. Oh! would that you could look upon it as I do, and view the society in the light that I see it; as a lowly but beautiful hand-maid to the church of God. It is the great vestibule through which the inebriate should pass, before he lifts his voice or claims membership in the great sanctuary, the church of God."

A Cute Yankee.

The following good one is published in "The Boston Visitor," of Harper's Magazine himself "Timmins."

Among our passengers coming home, said he, was Mr. H.—not long ago a deputy collector in our port, at the customhouse; a most entertaining gentleman, who has no idea that he is telling anything amusing, until he is reminded of it by the loud laughter of everybody about him.

When I was Deputy Collector in New York, says he, I was sitting in my office one hot afternoon, when a long, slabsided, Yankee-looking fellow came in with a kind of guilty look, his hat dangling in his hand, his head hanging on one side, and his eyes cast down, but with a curious kind of a smile, too, as I thought, sneaking furtively across his face. He stood by the door for a minute, twirling his hat, and seeming to be afraid to come forward to where I was sitting.

"Well, sir," I asked, "what is wanted?" "Be you Mr. H.—?" said he. "Yes, Mr. H.—is my name." "Yes, but be you the Deputy Collector of New York State?" I answered that I was the Deputy Collector of the Customs of the city of New York.

"Adzactly," says he—"yeas; the very man I want to see."

"I explained to him that the cigars must pay a duty, and that it was a great favor to himself to be permitted to take them away at all.

"Well," he said, putting on his hat, and holding the door ajar, "I hain't got no money to pay dewties; but I'll go up town up to—street, to see a friend of mine, and maybe he'll take'em out. Good-afternoon!"

The next day, just as I was about leaving my desk, the Yankee "operator" came in, bringing with him a dark, Spanish-looking person.

"I showed the impudent, designing unscrupulous fellow the door, and he went out winking and laughing. "We did had been a party to the nefarious transaction."

The Conjugating Dutchman.

Two English gentlemen once stepped into a coffee house in Paris, where they observed a tall, old-looking man, who appeared not to be a native, one of the tables, and looking around with the most stone like gravity of countenance upon every object. Soon after the two Englishmen entered one of them told the other that a certain dwarf had arrived in Paris. At this the grave looking personage above mentioned opened his mouth and spoke:

"I arrive, thou arrivest, he arrivest, we arrive, you arrive, they arrive." The Englishman, whose remark seemed to have suggested this mysterious speech, stepped up to the stranger and asked:—"did you speak to me sir?"

"I speak," replied the stranger, "thou speakest he speaks, we speak, you speak they speak."

"How is this?" said the Englishman.—"Do you mean to insult me?" The other replied, "I insult, thou insultest, he insults, we insult, you insult, they insult."

this explanation, and invited the conjugating Dutchman to dine with them.

Sunday Reading

SERVANTS OF GOD in joyful lays, Sing ye the Lord Jehovah's praise. Montgomery.

The Infant in Heaven. Dr. Chalmers furnishes the following touching expressions of his opinion on the subject of infant salvation. It is expressed in strong and beautiful language.

"This affords, we think, something more than a dubious glimpse into the question that is often put by a distracted mother when her babe is taken away from her; when all she can converse it ever had with the world amounted to the gaze upon it of a few months or a few opening smiles, which marked the dawn of self-judging, and ere it had reached, perhaps, the list of infancy, it, all unconscious of sickness with its power, and at length be overcome by it."

"Oh, it little knew what an interest it had created in that home where it was so passing a visitor, nor when carried to its early grave what a tide of emotions it would raise among the few acquaintances it left behind! There was no positive belief in its bosom; no love at all for the darkness rather than light, nor had it yet fallen into that great condemnation which will attach itself to all that perish, because of unbelief, that their deeds are evil."

"When we couple with this the known disposition of our great Forerunner—the love that He manifested for children upon earth; how He suffered them to approach His person, and lavished endearments and kindness upon them in Jerusalem; told the disciples that the presence and company of such as these, in heaven, formed one ingredient of joy that was set before Him—tell us if Christianity does not throw a pleasing radiance round an infant's tomb? And should any parent remember a babe of a fight, and at the end of this little period expired, and a few short months under his roof, and at the end of this little period expired, we cannot think we venture too far when we say he is only to persevere in the faith and in the following of the Gospel, and that very light will again shine upon him in heaven."

"The blossom which withered here upon its stalk has been transplanted there to a place of endurance; and it will then gladden the eye which now weeps out the agony of affection that has been sorely wounded. And in the name of Him who, if on earth, would have wept with them, do we bid all believers present to sorrow not even as those which have no hope, but to take comfort in the thought of that country where there is no sorrow and no separation."

Help your Ministers. You are to help your minister by distinct efforts of your own to lead the impotent to Christ. Not only are you to pray earnestly for them, to hold them as a burden upon your heart in communion with God, to feel that you cannot be dejected if they fall with supplications every public address to them, saying fervently, "Amen!" to each appeal of a preached gospel, but you are to go farther. You are to seek them out, to take hold of them, to converse with them, to be very kind, very urgent, very tender and very persevering. If you find one of them serious, you are to follow him up, to give him a rest—like that devoted servant of God—Harlan Page—to keep on his track day and night, to allow the world no opportunity to get new hold, the feelings no time to subside, the seriousness no space for dissipation, to help the spirit and the truth lead the soul into the kingdom.

In this way, can you be if you will, an I if God bless you, most effectual helpers of his servant and yours, who stands before you as your religious teacher and guide. Now, not to go further in specifying modes in which you may cooperate with your pastor, and help on in the cause of Christ, let me ask you as if addressing you one by one, what you say so far? Will you take up, if you have not, all these activities of serving God, and advancing Christ's kingdom and glory?—Congregationalist.