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TEMPERANCE.

LITTLE PELEG, THE DRUNKARD'S SON;

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Toper," "Esq.," and other Tales.

CHAPTER I.

The Christmas Supper.
Peleg—A homely name for a homely boy, but a boy as good as he was homely. Peleg Brown, or as the school boys tauntingly called him, because his complexion was nearly the color of a hazel nut, Brown Peleg, was the son of a worse than widowed woman, who lived in an humble cottage on the outskirts of a village situated upon the romantic stream, Kishacoquillas, a Pennsylvania tributary to the noble Juniata.

Peleg's mother, one of those gentle women, who seem only able to hold life in its sunshine aspects, but whose experience is an evidence that they have latent strength for cloud and storm, was worse than widowed, because her husband, John Brown, had, for several years, been a confirmed drunkard, dependent upon the efforts of his gentle wife and feeble son for his food, raiment and shelter, as well as for the means, obtained through force and stealth, by which he purchased, at the village grog-shop, the numerous drinks that rendered his wife a creature of sorrow, and his son a youth shamed and forsaken by the boys of his age.

It was Christmas—a holiday to boys—but a day of labor to Brown. With his saw buck in his shoulder and his wood saw in his arm, Peleg trudged through the snow, from one house to another, to do a job. A pile of wood in the mansion of one of the wealthiest men of the village attracted his attention, and he begged the privilege of sawing it into proper stove-lengths. He was told that he might carry it into the back-yard, saw it, and pile in the wood-house. It was a good job, Peleg was a small boy, but he thought how many comforts he might buy his mother with the money the job would bring him, and, with a cheerful heart, and a willing hand, he went to work. Noon came and he sat down in his saw-buck to eat his frugal dinner. It was a blustering day, and the snow, whirled from the tops of the houses, fell upon Peleg, until he looked as if he were a miller's apprentice, but he heeded not the snow or the cold, and was hurrying with his repast, that he might have the more time to work, when he found himself face to face, with a handsome, well-dressed boy, about his own age, but of much larger size, who said to him:

"Hallo, little fellow, how much did you have to spend for Christmas?"

"I had nothing, sir," honestly answered Peleg, somewhat astonished at the abrupt question, "but if I work well to-day, mother will make me a nice pie when I go home."

"Ha, ha," cried the well-dressed boy—"work on a Christmas and get a nice pie for it. You're a little unfortunate. Where do you live?"

"This was said with an air, as if the speaker regarded Peleg a curiosity; but Peleg was too honest to notice such irony, and he answered frankly:

"I live in the little house back of the church on the common."

"Oh! then you are the son of drunken Brown. No wonder you don't have any money to spend on Christmas. I had three dollars—my father ain't a drunkard."

Peleg was hurt—sorely hurt—but he thought of his mother and uttered no retort. He made his saw run glibly through the wood, and paid no attention to the careless boy that had taunted him. When he turned around to get another stick of wood to lay upon his buck, he noticed that his tormentor was gone.

This boy was the only son of the merchant for whom Peleg was sawing wood. When he left the yard, he ran into the parlor, where his mother, father and sister were sitting, and marching up to the latter, he whispered:

"There's a character in the yard, Jane, a chap that'll just suit you. He is sawing wood on Christmas to get a pie at night. Ain't he a character?"

"What character," inquired the father, catching the last words, "come, Frank, what mischief have you been up to now?"

"Nothing, Pa," returned the boy,

only I had been out to see my pony, when I found a character in the yard—the son of drunken Brown is sawing our wood, and I had some fun with him."

"You did not make fun of his misfortunes, I hope, my son," said the mother.

"No, mamma," returned Frank, "I only laughed at him a little for having to saw wood Christmas, and being content with a nice pie at night."

"That was naughty, Frank," said Jane.

"Come, come, Jane," interrupted the father, "let Frank have his sport to-day. You may preach to him to-morrow. But, Frank, you must not associate with drunkard's sons and wood-sawyers. It is best enough to have one in the family given to such company."

The last sentence was intended as a reprimand to Jane. She felt it, and left the parlor. As she walked to her own room, the tears started in her eyes, and her heart said "Why does not father love me? He tells me I am homely. He says Frank is his only pride: but I love father, though he never does call me Pet. I'm sure if I do associate with the drunkard's children it's not to disgrace them, but it is because I love to see them have something good to eat, and wear. Ma loves me for this, and other people say I am good.—Why does not Pa love me?"

Again, and again she asked herself this question, and still she could find no answer, but that she was a homely girl, and Frank was a handsome boy. She did not feel that her father was a worldly man—one whose heart was on houses and lands and stocks and bills—that he loved Frank because he was a fine looking boy—that he expected him to sustain the credit of the house of Pridore & Co., and that he had nothing to expect of Jane, because she was not only homely, but seemed to have no joy in the society of the rich and proud who visited his house—would rather, even when it stormed, carry a basket of clothing around to the poor children in the neighborhood, than sit in the parlor and play on the piano for visitors. Frank laughed at Jane for these "whimsies." He loved the dashing company that visited his father's house—he was well pleased when his father allowed him to sit down with the proud visitors to a rich supper, and drink the choice wine which flowed freely around the board. Sometimes his mother thought he took too much wine, but the father said:

"No. It don't hurt him. He's of the real Pridore stock. He knows what good wine is, and it is good for him."

Night was approaching—little Peleg prepared to quit work for the day. His "job" was not finished, but he sent a modest request into the house that, as it was Christmas, he might be paid for what he had done; promising to come on the morrow and complete his work. His request was granted, and he was carefully placing the hard earned sixpences in the pocket of his ragged jacket, when a young lady crossed the yard towards him. It was Jane, who had determined to do something for the drunkard's son, which would cause him to forget Frank's harshness, and remember that Christmas with pleasure.

She spoke kindly to Peleg, and told him he must not think hard of what her brother had said. He is a thoughtless boy.

"I didn't only for a moment, kind lady," said Peleg, "I know he doesn't feel what it is to be a drunkard's son. I am a poor boy, but I've got a good mother, and I love her."

"You are a good boy," said Jane, "stay here a moment. I have something to send you mother."

Peleg put down his saw-buck, and Jane ran into the house. In a moment she appeared again, bringing a basket which was carefully covered, and which Peleg found to be heavy when Jane put it into his hand, saying—

"Carry this to your mother, and tell her it is from Jane Pridore."

"We are not beggars," was on Peleg's lip, but Jane smiled upon him so sweetly, he could not say it. Thanking her with a tone which made her heart thrill, he bid her good evening, and ran homewards. He had worked hard, and was tired; he carried

his wood-saw and buck and a heavy basket, but the remembrance of Jane's smile was warm in his heart, and he walked not a step until he reached his mother's cottage.

He was gladly received—joyfully welcomed, and the basket was quickly opened. There, nicely and carefully packed, was an assortment of delicacies such as Peleg had never partaken of, and each as his mother had not seen for many years.

The mother prepared the Christmas supper in the neatest style her meagerly furnished house would allow, and when Peleg had dressed himself, in his Sabbath school suit, they sat down to such a repast as had never been eaten in that cottage.—There was but one thing wanting to complete comfort—the husband and father could not partake with mother and son. He was at the village grog-shop, and he did not come home till long after Peleg had recited his lessons to his mother, and was dreaming of Jane Pridore.

The wife had left for the husband a portion of the Christmas supper in the most tempting manner she could prepare it, but he was in no mood for "delicacies." He threw himself upon his couch—slept the sleep of a drunkard, and was away from the cottage again as soon as it was light, seeking his bitters.

CHAPTER II.

The Birth-Night Party.
Spring had come—Birds sang sweetly in the bushes and modest flowers were springing to new life in the narrow beds around the pretty cottage where dwelt little Peleg, and his mother—but within there was sadness, sorrow and death.—There lay a body, prepared for the narrow bed appointed for all the living, from which there is no new life—the Spirit unprepared; had been liberated, by violence, from the bonds which confined it to earth, and was now where it witnessed, in all dreadful reality, the degrading results of those habits which debase high resolves and yield holy pleasures, for the gratification of low passions and grovelling appetites.

The husband and father had been found dead, on the highway between the village grog-shop and his home.—His death was a violent one—what man who ever died of the direct influences of intoxication did not have a violent death!

The funeral was not numerously attended; from the church yard to their saddened home, but one person accompanied the chief mourners—that one was Jane Pridore. She was welcomed to the cottage in a manner which showed that she was a frequent but never a tedious visitor.

"You have been so kind to us," said Peleg—"You are a little girl not bigger than I am, but you can do so much."

"Father is kind to me, Peleg. He is rich, and I have something to do with. If you were as rich as I am, you could do a great deal more than I do."

"I'll be rich some day," said Peleg, "I know I will, and then I'll do a great deal. I'll not forget the poor, I know I won't."

"Perhaps you can do something for some of my folks some day," returned Jane.

"But you're so rich, you'll never be poor, and what I can do I must do for the poor. I never can forget the time when I was a poor drunkard's son, if I live to be a hundred years old, and get as rich as Stephen Girard," answered Peleg.

"I've read in my books, Peleg," said Jane, "of many rich people becoming poor. You nor I don't know what may happen; but I must run home now. Good bye Peleg, and good bye Mrs. Brown."

"Good bye, my little benefactress," said Mrs. Brown.

Peleg followed Jane to the garden gate, and there said good bye, as Jane went tripping over the common towards the village. In a moment she cried "Peleg! Peleg!"

Peleg ran to meet her when she whispered, as if the wind must not catch the sound and bear it to other ears.

"I've thought of something Peleg—I've something to tell you, Peleg—but I won't tell it now—to-morrow, Peleg, to-morrow."

And although the boy made an effort to detain her, in a moment she was tripping across the common

again. Peleg could not imagine why Jane should not tell him then, if she had any thing important to communicate, nor was he able to conjecture what she might have to tell him. He went back to the cottage, but said nothing of Jane's conduct, determined that until he knew her secret, he would keep his own.

When Jane reached home, she found that her father and mother had just taken dinner, and were in the parlor. She ate her dinner in haste, fearing that her father would go the store before she could see him. When she was ready to enter the parlor, he was still at home, however, and she greeted him in her most pleasant manner.

"And where have you been roaming to-day, Jane?" inquired Mr. Pridore.

"I went to Mr. Brown's funeral."

"The Browns have become great favorites of yours, Jane."

"They are nice people, father, and I could not neglect the mother, and that honest little boy, just because Mr. Brown was a drunkard."

"Well—well, Jane, you can't be Frank, and I suppose you must have your whims; I don't expect much of you."

"Now, pa, don't be cross, or scold me to-day," said Jane, walking up confidently to her father, and placing her hand on his knees, "I have something to ask of you."

Mr. Pridore was a man, who, with all his harshness to Jane, loved to indulge her. He was touched by her winning manner, and said, smiling—

"Well, Jane, I am not in a bad humor, and it would not be strange if I granted you a favor, notwithstanding you have been a truant to-day."

"No, pa; mother said I might go to the funeral; but I don't want to ask anything for myself. I heard one of the clerks say, this morning, that a boy was needed at the store. Won't you let that little Peleg Brown, come? He'll work hard, father, and I know he's honest."

"Well, well, Jane," said Mr. Pridore, "I should think you were getting familiar with the Browns. The first we know, this little Peleg will be a beau of yours, a drunkard's son waiting upon my daughter!"

"No—no, father; I am sure I never thought of having a beau. I don't want a beau," interrupted Jane, in her simplicity, not seeing the bearing of her father's objections. "But, pa, do give this boy a place. He supports his mother, and I'm sure he's honest."

"You've set your heart on it, Jane. Perhaps I'll take this fellow; I'll see about it this evening."

"Thank you, pa; not for myself, but for the poor boy's widowed mother," said Jane; following her father, as he walked through the hall, on his way to the counting-room of the firm of Pridore & Co.

Whether Mr. Pridore made any inquiries respecting Peleg Brown, he never chose to disclose; but certain it is that, on the morrow, Jane sent a note to the boy which, when he opened it, with beating heart, and glistening eye, he found to contain the following words:

"Dear Peleg:—I could not come to see you to-day, and tell you that secret, so I have sent this note.—You are to live at our house—no, you are to work in the store, and live at home if you please. Will you come? Don't say no. I got the place for you, from pa. Come this afternoon. Pa will tell you what you must do, in the evening; he is so kind."

"Mother—mother!" cried Peleg, after he had read the note over and over again, half a dozen times, "mother, oh mother! see here—I told you I told you I should be rich—I know I shall. See here—see what that little girl, not bigger than I am, and not as old, has done for me. I couldn't do anything for myself or you, but saw wood and ran errands; but mother, see what Jane has done. Oh! I never thought it; but now I will do something for myself, mother, and for you. I will be rich, and I'll have a store of my own some day, and then I'll give poor boys a chance; and good boys whose fathers are dead, like mine, shall have the first chance. Oh! mother, we shall be so happy; don't you think we shall?"

"Yes, my child," said Mrs. Brown, who, during Peleg's rhapsody, had

read the note; "I am glad you have got this piece: Jane is very kind to us."

"Indeed she is, mother. I love her so. I'll be a brother to her—more than a brother."

Mrs. Brown looked at her boy with a singular expression; she felt the meaning of his words, but knew that he did not, and she was compelled that when he did understand their true import, they might be to him the talisman of his several trials.

In a few days little Peleg was regularly installed, assistant clerk, with the duties of an errand boy, in the store of Pridore & Co. His salary was a meager one, but he was accustomed to frugality.

He performed his duties for nearly a year, with such strict assiduity and excellent judgment, that he was more rapidly promoted than boys of his age usually are in extensive stores and before the end of the first quarter of the second year, he was considered one of the most trustworthy sales men of the establishment. He had not been in the employment of Pridore & Co. a year and a half, when he was made assistant book-keeper, with an increased salary.

Jane had watched the promotions of her little friend with much interest, but that he might hold her father's favor, she said nothing about him, unless spoken to a reference to his conduct.

Peleg often wondered why Jane was not as familiar with him, as she had been when he was a wood-sawyer, but as he grew older, he felt that they could not be brother and sister, except in such circumstances as placed them socially for ever apart, and whenever he had reason to rejoice over prosperity, he would go to his trunk, and taking out Jane's note, which had been most carefully treasured, he would again peruse it with a beating heart and glistening eye, and say as he had said to his mother, when he read this note for the first time.

"I will be rich—I know I will."

One afternoon, Peleg was arranging some accounts in a private room, when Frank Pridore paid him a visit.

"Come little Brown," said he, "you never have been one of us, but you must come out to-night, this is my twenty-first birthday. After the party at father's to-night, where you will be, of course, in the boys in the store will adjourn down town for a grand spree. You will join us this once. You shan't back out."

"You will excuse me, Mr. Pridore," said Peleg, mildly.

"No, I won't excuse you," answered Frank shortly, "I won't do any such thing."

"I have never been on a spree," said Peleg.

"You needn't spree, if you don't want to," returned Frank, but you shall go. "I cannot go," returned Peleg, firmly, "I would not countenance a spree by my presence."

"Ah! I remember," said Frank, "you are one of those timid fools of wine, afraid of being a drunkard. I'm not; I need not get drunk unless I want to. My father did not die a drunkard."

"These are hard words, Mr. Pridore," answered Peleg, with a trembling voice; "if you live many years you will repent them; but I forgive you now, for your sister's sake."

"Pooh!" cried Frank with a sneer. "She's another of your canters, who think there's death in a social glass of wine. We wanted no empty chairs at our feast to-night, but empty chairs are better than canting fellows, who have no sociability. Good day, Mr. Temperance Preacher."

Peleg's heart was heavy when Frank left him, but associations were awakened, which ever carry a bitter sting to the sensitive heart. He determined that he would not attend the birth-night party at Mr. Pridore's, an invitation to which had been given him by Frank, at Jane's solicitation. When he left the store after the day was over, he despatched a note to Jane, in these words:

"Miss Pridore,—A conversation with your brother this afternoon, in which my father's misfortunes were the subject of ridicule, will make it necessary for me to forego the pleasure of seeing you at his birth-night party. Your friend,

PELEG BROWN."

some time. She flew to Frank for an explanation.

"Bravo!" he answered, when he had read the note. "Bravo! I like the fellow's spunk. He forgives the inestimable pleasure of seeing you, Jane, because when he refused to join the boys in a jubilee after the party, I told him he was afraid of being a drunkard, like his father."

"You were naughty," said Jane, in a tone which, had not the brother been flushed with wine, he would long have remembered. "It was unworthy of my brother; I would not have come here to-night, if I had been in Mr. Brown's place."

"To be sure you would not; you and he would make a good match. But yonder's a party drinking bumper to me; I cannot waste time with you, Jane."

Frank was gone to join his wine-drinking companions. As she saw him drink glass after glass, Jane thought of what she had once said to Peleg about doing something for her folks some day, and she pressed closer the little note she had that evening received, and wished—

When Peleg had taken supper with his mother, and many times refused to confide to her the cause of a manifest depression of spirits he walked down into the village, found his way to his little room back of the store, and, taking up an engaging book, read and thought, and calculated, till a late hour. It was after midnight when he began to retrace his steps to the cottage. As he sauntered slowly through a portion of the village sparsely inhabited, he observed a man lying across the dilapidated steps of an untenanted building. He stooped to look at the unfortunate, and ascertain whether he was insensible, or had been physically injured by ruffians, when something fell from about the dress arrested his attention. He dragged the apparently lifeless body towards a hotel a few rods distant, and by the light reflected from the bar-room, was able to discover that he had found—as it were, dead in the street—the only son of his employer. His birth-night spree had been too much for Frank Pridore: he had entered manfully upon the year of his majority.

Peleg was grieved and bewildered—grieved to find young Pridore in such a situation, and bewildered in respect to his duty towards him and the family. He forgot all the harsh words Frank had said to him, and determined that he would endeavor to get him to his father's house without calling such assistance as might make public the young man's degradation. He applied at the hotel, and succeeded in arousing the ostler, who, for half a week's wages, consented to assist Peleg. Frank was borne home. When they approached the Pridore mansion, Peleg dismissed his "help," and knowing the appointments of the house, he awakened a servant without arousing the family, and told him that he wished to see Mr. Pridore on important business, and that he must be awakened without alarming any other member of the household. The servant was faithful—he had often discharged such duties—and Mr. Pridore soon met Peleg, who conducted him to Frank, and explained the circumstances under which he had been found.

The services of the servant who had awakened Mr. Pridore, were further required, and Frank was secretly conveyed into the house, and silently placed in his own bed. When Peleg departed from Mr. Pridore, the latter said:

"I am deeply indebted to you for your discretion; neither Miss or Mrs. Pridore must know a word of this."

"I have only done my duty, sir," returned Peleg; "I should respect your feelings."

Mr. Pridore wished Frank had fallen into the care of any young man of the village, rather than Peleg Brown. As he stood by the bedside of his drunken son, he thought of the time when he knew John Brown, who died a drunkard, to be a wealthy and respectable man; he thought of the Christmas day Peleg sawed wood in his yard, and he reflected on the encouragement he then gave his now drunken boy, to take freely of that which had degraded him.

These were bitter thoughts for an over-indulgent father.

CHAPTER III. Rewards and Punishments.

Five years had elapsed since Frank Pridore celebrated his twenty-first birth-night. Peleg Brown was first clerk in the extensive store of Pridore & Co. Mr. Pridore had treated him with distant, but marked respect ever since the night on which his judgment was so nicely exercised for the reputation of the heir apparent to the Pridore station and importance. But there were now no occasions for the exercise of nice discrimination on this subject. Frank Pridore was a gentle soul, and he was so regarded in the village generally; not that a man can be gentle and be a sot—but Frank Pridore's sottishness was gentle compared with that of many drinking men in the village. He was never seen drunk in the streets—he was never engaged in drunken brawls—his father kept the strictest watch upon him.

Little Brown's mother had been in the land of Spirits two years. Peleg had, through life, loved his mother with that child-like fondness which ever regards mother the dearest of names, and he mourned her deeply.

The first clerk in the store of Pridore & Co. knew well that for at least three years the capital of the firm had not been augmented, and he well knew also that in the last year it had very materially decreased, and he believed that something of this state of affairs was owing to the insidious influence of the "siren foe," that had saddened his earlier years and embittered, for life, the recollections of his childhood.

At the beginning of the sixth year of little Brown's clerkship he was engaged to take an inventory of the "stock in trade" of Pridore & Co. When the work was completed to the satisfaction of his employers, he was informed that it was the intention of the junior partner of the firm to retire, and that he was desirous of finding some person who would purchase his interest.

"On the evening after Peleg learned this fact," he called at the Pridore mansion and begged an hours conversation with the proprietor.

Supposing that something important in reference to business was to be communicated, Mr. Pridore promptly invited little Brown to his private room. When they had talked together on general matters for a few moments, Mr. Pridore said:

"You have something important to communicate, I understand."

"I am informed," replied Peleg, "that Mr. Hanks is desirous of finding some one who will purchase his interest in the store."

"Such is the fact," said Mr. Pridore, "and I wish that I knew of some man acquainted with our business, who could take his place since it is forbidden me to give it to my son, for whom I had intended it. Pridore & Son, I should have rejoiced to see that name in gilt letters over the door of the store, but—but, it is past. I speak freely to you, sir. You respect my feelings?"

"For that reason I have called upon you. I have had some intention of making Mr. Hanks a proposition, and before doing so, I wished to consult you," replied Peleg.

"You," exclaimed Mr. Pridore. "You, make Mr. Hanks a proposition. Where in the name of Heaven did you get money enough to talk of buying an interest in the business of Pridore and company?"

"When my mother died the cottage and lot was mine, sir, I sold them for fifteen hundred dollars. I invested the money in property on the Creek, which has more than doubled in value; and besides, sir, I have saved nearly two thousand dollars out of my wages since I have been in your employ."

"Yes! yes!" said Mr. Pridore. "I had forgotten. You have been a saving boy—but I'll think of this. It is unexpected. I'll see Mr. Hanks. Leave me now."

When Peleg was gone, Mr. Pridore had sorrowful reflections. He reviewed his life. He thought of the time when he and John Brown, Peleg's father, drank wine together—he thought of Peleg the little wood-sawyer—of John Brown's awful death—then he thought of his own habits, and the gradual encroachments upon his independence, of the love of what had made his boy—whom he had regarded in his youth with so much pride—a reproach to his family—and when he thought of his boy, then Peleg the drunkard's son came up in contrast, a source of most poignant reproach, haunting him, he threw himself upon a couch, and conjured to himself the remarks of his correspondents in business, when they learned that little Brown was the junior partner of the firm of Pridore & Co.

The "fates" had decreed. Peleg Brown took Mr. Hanks' place in the firm of Pridore & Co. He and Jane Pridore had been distant acquaintances during the whole period of his clerkship, but as he was now a frequent visitor at the Pridore mansion, on terms