

The Drunkard's Vow

"GOOD-BY, Jim Brown, you have got the last cent of my money that you will ever get," said a poor, miserable looking wretch, as he turned to leave the bar room of a hotel, where a large company of men sat drinking and carousing.

"I guess when you find a few cents, I shall get them, Jake," answered the besotted landlord with a sneer, "but I tell you again that you will get no more drinks off me until you pay off the old debt."

"Good-by, Jim Brown," said old Jake again, you will never get one cent of it, nor will you ever sell me another glass of strong drink."

"Goin' to sign the pledge, Jake?" queried another voice, "guess 'twill not do you much good if you do, for you like rum too well to keep it long."

"Maybe I shall sign the pledge," was the reply, but I consider my word here, just as sacred and binding as a written pledge, and so I solemnly swear before God and man never to touch another drop of the accursed poison so long as I live," and Jake retreated toward the door as he said it.

"Hold on, Jake, don't go yet," called out another voice, "come back and I will treat you. Here, landlord, give him a good glass of whiskey to make him better natured." But Jake never looked toward the speaker, and still kept moving slowly toward the door.

"You will try in vain, I guess," he slowly said, "for I have drunk my last glass of liquor, God helping me," and old Jake Bell walked away.

"Wonder what has got into the old fool," said one of the bar-room loungers, "for I never knew him to refuse a glass of whiskey before."

"Guess he'll come back before many days go by," was heard from another part of the room. "Suppose that old Jake should reform," said one who had not spoken before, "I never saw him with such a fit on, and if he should stick to what he said, Landlord Brown has lost one of his best customers."

"And a few shillings besides," chimed in another voice. "Guess he has not lost much by old Jake Bell, for if I'm not mistaken, his money has been quite an advantage to Jim Brown for a number of years," was the reply.

"Stop your noise, will you?" said the landlord, with a scowl on his face, "I'll take care of old Jake."

"Perhaps he'll take care of himself," was his reply, "and I think he would do quite as well, and his wife and children would be the gainers."

"Stop your infernal noise, Bill Gray, or leave the room," yelled the landlord, growing black with passion.

"If I do go," said Bill quietly, "I shall go as old Jake did, never to come back again. You know that what Bill Gray says, he means."

Susan Bell sat by the low window of her house, looking out upon the beautiful landscape, bathed with the golden rays of the setting sun. There was an expression of pain and sadness upon her face, and occasionally a tear gleamed in her faded eyes.

We doubt if the glory of the fields and the sky had awakened one cheerful thought in her heart, and if it did, the dark clouds of misery soon turned the ray of sunlight to gloom again. Ah! The bright hopes of other days had long ago died out from the heart of Susan Bell, and the gray shadows of wretchedness had long thronged her pathway.

But the time had been when this wretched woman had seen bright days of happiness, though they appeared now like some fairy dream, which cast its mocking glory upon the barren wastes of life.

Strong drink had destroyed the hopes of poor Susan Bell, and driven peace and plenty away from the once cheerful fireside. It had ruined the prospects of Jacob Bell, and made him a miserable, besotted wretch. In other days he had been loved and respected, for he possessed many noble, generous qualities, and he seemed likely to become a man of more than ordinary usefulness in the world.

But he became possessed with a thirst for strong drink, and so started upon the fearful road of sin and ruin. His children once made music in their home, but after he began his career of sin and shame, disease laid its hand upon two of them, and they died.

Mrs. Bell did not murmur as the death angel claimed them, for she saw the storm that was gathering. It came all too soon, and then she thanked God that there were only two children left to suffer the abuse of a drunken father and to bear the heavy load of want and poverty. Jim Brown had taken the earnings of the husband and father for many years, and in return, gave him the deadly poison that made him a brute and deadened every impulse of nobleness.

"He has gone to Brown's, as usual," said Susan Bell to herself. "Oh, how I wish that he would not go there so often! He will never even try to reform as long as he goes there to spend his leisure hours." A tear dropped from her eyes as she looked in the direction of the village tavern. "It will do no good to hope any longer, for he will never do any better," she said half aloud.

The sun went down behind the western mountain and twilight began to gather over the earth. Still Susan Bell sat by the low window, looking toward the now lighted bar-room. "Why ! he is coming!" she exclaimed, as she saw the well known form of her husband, coming down the street, in the twilight "How strange that Jacob should come home so early; I wonder what it means."

Jacob walked steadily into the house, and in a pleasant voice asked: "Susan, will you get some supper? I am very hungry."

"We have but little to eat, Jacob," was the reply, "but I will get you what we have."

"Have we any flour or sugar, Susan," was the next inquiry.

"None," was the reply.

"Then I will go and buy some," said Jacob. "Mr. Grant is owing me for a half day's work, and I guess he can pay me."

"Susan Bell's heart beat very fast as her husband started out again. "Oh, if he does not stop at Brown's!" she exclaimed to herself.

He did not stop at Brown's, although a dozen voices called to him as he was passing by. "I think you will not succeed," he said quietly, as he walked toward home.

"Now, make supper, Susan," he said, as he placed several small packages upon the table.

His wife quickly obeyed, and in a short time Jacob sat down to a better supper than he had had for many a day.

"I am very tired to-night," he said, as he finished the meal, "but please call me early in the morning, Susan, for I am going to work for Mr. Grant. I have taken the job of building his barn, and want to get it well started this week."

Mrs. Bell could scarcely sleep that night; there was a strange, deep joy in her heart, that she had not known for years. And yet, she hardly dared to hope. She really could not account for the strange conduct of her husband.

The day came with its beautiful splendor, and just as the morning sun began to bathe the far away mountains with light, Jacob Bell sat down to his morning meal.

After breakfast, he asked: "Have you enough flour to last to-day?"

"We have a little," was the reply.

The day passed away at last, and just as the sun was setting, Jacob Bell entered the door of his home.

"Here are three dollars, Susan," he said. "Take the money and use it as you think best. Herbert can bring home whatever you like, for he will not work any longer for Mr. Hill. He is not strong enough to do such work as he has been in the habit of doing there. He will go to school the remainder of the summer."

Mrs. Bell said not a word. She only hoped and prayed. Another day passed away and three dollars more were placed in her hands. A whole week went by, and her husband had worked every day, and had not once visited Jim Brown's saloon.

Then he came home one night with a new suit of clothes. "These were a present to me," he said simply, in reply to Susan's inquiry. "Mr. Grant gave them to me."

"And why did he do it, Jacob?" asked Susan in a trembling voice.

"If I tell you, then you will know my secret. But I think I will. It was because I signed the pledge."

"Have you signed the pledge, Jacob?" asked the wife in a voice choked with emotion.

"Yes," he quietly answered, "and with God's help, I will keep it. Jim Brown has got the last cent of my money that he will ever get."

"Why did you take this step?" Susan asked, trying very hard to keep her voice from trembling.

"I can't really tell you, Susan, but Mr. Grant, I think, was the true cause of it. He has talked so earnestly and kindly to me of late, that I saw myself as I never did before.

"And then about a week ago, I went to Jim Brown's bar-room and asked him to trust me for a drink. I was owing him a few shillings, and as he was nearly drunk himself, he refused to trust me. I was very angry; and then I made a vow before all present never to drink another drop of liquor, and as I have said before, God helping me, I will never taste that accursed poison again."

Susan Bell silently thanked God, and earnestly prayed that he would help her husband to keep his vow sacredly.

Five years have passed away with their sunshine and shadow, and still Jacob Bell keeps his vow. His skillful hand has transformed the old brown house, and it is the prettiest cottage in the village. Everything about the place betokens thrift and plenty.

Jacob Bell looks much younger than he did five years ago, and for some reason, people do not call him "Old Jake" any more. The village tavern still stands, but old Jim Brown died long ago with delirium tremens. Another rum seller fills his place, but Jacob Bell has never spoken to him. Thus the drunkard, by the help of God, did keep his vow.

Saying NO!

"No!" The word was clear, sharp, and ringing, with an emphasis that could not fail to arrest attention.

"I don't often hear such a negative as that," remarked one gentleman to another as they were passing the playground.

"It is not often anyone hears it. The boy who uttered it can say Yes, too, quite as emphatically. He is a newcomer here, an orphan, who lives with his uncle, about two miles away. He walks in every morning, bringing his lunch, and walks back at night. He works enough to pay his board, and does more toward running his uncle's farm than the man does himself. He is the most coarsely dressed boy in the school, and the greatest favorite. Everybody knows just what to expect of him."

"Quite a character. I should like to see him. Boys of such a sturdy make-up are getting to be scarce."

"That is true. If you wish to see Ned, come this way."

They moved on a few steps, pausing by an open gate near which a group of lads were excitedly discussing some question.

"It isn't right, and I won't have anything to do with it. When I say No, I mean it."

"Well, anyway, you needn't speak so loud, and tell everybody about it," one of the boys responded impatiently.

"I am willing everybody should hear what I have to say about it. I won't take anything that does not belong to me; and I won't drink cider, anyway."

"Such a fuss about a little fun! It's just what we might have expected. You never go in for fun."

"I never go in for doing wrong. I told you No, to begin with. And you are the ones to blame if there has been any fuss."

"Ned Dunlap, I should like to see you a minute."

"Yes, sir!" And the boy removed his hat as he passed through the gate, and waited to hear what Mr. Palmer might say to him.

"Has your uncle any apples to sell?"

"No, sir. He had some, but he has sold them. I have two bushels that were my share for picking. Would you like to buy them, sir?"

"Yes, if we can agree on the price. Do you know how much they are worth?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, then, I will call for them, and you may call at my house for the pay."

This short interview afforded the stranger an opportunity to observe Ned Dunlap closely. The next day, a call was made at his uncle's, and although years passed before he knew what a friend he had gained that day, his future was assured. After he had grown to manhood, he was offered a good job. He asked why it had been offered him.

"Because I knew you could say No if necessary," answered his employer. "'No' was the first word I heard you speak, and you spoke it with a will. More people, old and young, are ruined for want of using that word than from any other cause. They do not wish to do wrong, but they hesitate over the temptation until the tempter has them fast. The boy or girl who is not afraid to say 'No' is reasonably certain of becoming an honorable man or woman."