

SAVED!

TEMPERANCE STORY.

BY JEROME A. ANDERSON.

"George Horton, I do love you better than my own life, and yet I cannot, dare not, consent to become your wife until you have made me a solemn promise. For both of our sakes, George, promise never to touch strong drink again."

For an instant the hot blood mantled the brow of the young man, and then as suddenly disappeared, leaving him pale and trembling, and almost indignant. Was he the most promising young lawyer in N—, with the path to fame and affluence fair and invitingly open to him—was he in danger of becoming a common drunkard? Must he, on the very threshold of his declaration of love to his heart's idol, be met with a pledge of total abstinence? No; he knew her strength as well as his own weakness, and his love must be met fully, frankly, and without conditions.

Like the rapidity with which the deed of a drowning man are said to pass before his sight, came the memory of many a wild and reckless hour, when among convivial companions, he knew he had far overstepped the bounds of safety; and now, looking into the beautiful eyes turned so lovingly and blushing upon him, the strong tide of love, like a tornado, swept all else from his heart, and enfolding her in his arms with an embrace almost convulsive in its energy, he whispered:

"You have my most solemn promise, Ethel!"

Fair, innocent and beautiful as a new-blown rose, loving, trusting as the fly of the valley was Ethel Kane as she stood in her bridal robes to receive her nuptial vows. A poet's dream of perfected manhood seemed the handsome form at her side. And not one of the many friends gathered there, when he looked upon the beautiful form of Judge Kane's daughter, and the broad, talented brow of the young lawyer beside her, but said in his heart: "They are indeed well matched."

Scarcely the low spoken vows are given on earth; joyfully are heard and recorded in heaven! And George Horton and Ethel Kane have promised to love, honor and cherish "till death do us part."

Ten times since the opening of our story has old Father Time tolled the knell of a departed year. The world seems the same busy scene of restless turmoil, of struggle and strife, of victory and defeat, of life and death; and yet how changed! How many of its busiest and most important actors have passed off the stage, and given a reluctant place to those who are so eagerly and relentlessly forcing their way into the beginning of the drama! How have the high fallen, the low been uplifted, the joyous made sad, the saddened made to rejoice!

And amid all this change, din and confusion, shall we attempt to trace the thread of our story further? Then come with me, and we will lift the latch and enter this miserable old dwelling. Soberly, very softly. See! there is only a wren, wretched woman, who from sheer exhaustion has bowed her head upon an old table, and is, perhaps in dreamland treading paths of love and light she may never know. Can this ill-clad, sorrow-stricken, suffering woman be the bright, happy Ethel Kane of only ten years ago? It cannot be; and yet there are lingering traces of loveliness, a remnant of the old beauty that tells us it must be.

An old clock on the mantle is telling the hour of ten, so slowly and softly that it seems to fear it will waken the sleeper. Let us glance around the room. An old bureau, a common deal table, a few rickety chairs, a bed, and a few cooking utensils complete list of furniture. Not a single appliance of luxury or even of comfort, except, perhaps, an old Bible, a bunch of faded flowers that look withered and wan, as though out of very sympathy with the lonely inmates. Can this be the home of her that was reared a very pet in the lap of luxury?

Hark! There is a footstep coming up the walk; a child's footstep, and yet it seems to tread slowly and sadly, as though oppressed by sorrow's weight. Gently the latch is again lifted, and a little girl of perhaps eight summers enters the room. And if the days of sprites and fairies were not long since passed, we would surely believe this to be a good angel, sent to comfort the grief-stricken heart before her. Softly she goes to the sleeping one, and lays her hand lovingly on the weary head.

"Mother!"

the mother, and folding her child to her bosom, she murmured: "Well, my darling?"

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed the little one in a quivering voice, "I went to Mrs. Drakes, but she said she could not pay you before to-morrow, and then I came to the baker's and waited over so long before he would speak to me, and then he said we must pay what we owe him before he would trust us any more."

A strange, hard look came into the eyes of the mother, but as they met those of her daughter, it faded away, and folding her still closer, she said: "Are you very hungry, Grace?"

"No, mamma," returned the little one, with a voice quivering with sympathy; "but I am afraid you are."

"No; I am not, my darling, so we will pray for poor papa, and try to sleep."

Sido by side knelt mother and child, and prayed, and womanlike for the blessing of heaven on him who was so cruelly wronging them.

Scarcely had they arisen when a heavy, uncertain step sounded on the walk, and the next moment the father staggered in.

Great Heaven! If the change in Ethel had been so great that she could hardly be recognized, it was nothing compared to that which had taken place in George Horton!

For the manly form, the intelligent eye, and the gentle accents of ten years ago, we have now the reeling step, the glaring look and the harsh tones of the rum mania.

"What are you two up this time o' night for, I'd like to know?" he growled fiercely. "Go to bed, both of you, this minute!"

home of paupers. Great God! Silently he hurried away, and sought first a dealer in provisions.

"Mr. Gibson, I want some food for my wife and child. I'll pay for it to-night."

There was a look in his eye that told the dealer that some change had taken place, and he silently placed before him the necessary articles. Grasping them, he again hurried homeward. Entering softly he found the wife and child still in the light, troubled slumber in which he had left them. Cautiously depositing his load, he turned and left the room without awakening them. As he reached the open air he bared his burning brow and registered another vow high up in heaven, that he would never, NEVER touch the damning cup again!

"Hullo, old fellow!"

"Where in the world are you going, my boy, in such a hurry as that?" said the nodding and smiling Satan.

"Come in and get suthin' to put you on your legs this morning."

"No; I am obliged," said Horton. "I do not want anything this morning."

"Pooh, pooh, man, no nonsense; come right in and get a nice toddy; my treat, you know," and the dramseller put on his most engaging smile.

"No; not any more toddy for me, I do not want my wife in the almshouse in six months," answered Horton, decidedly, as he turned contemptuously away from the viper and strode on.

"What can have come over the man, and what did he mean by talkin' of the poor house that way?" wondered exclaimed the rum-seller, as he turned to re-enter his den.

"I do not know, my darling. I hope he did," and as the remembrance of old, happy days came upon her, she bowed her head and gave way to a flood of tears, half hopeful, half sad.

How slowly passed that long, long day! What alternations of hope and fear crossed her breast as she wondered if it was really the deed of her husband, and the omen of better days, or was it some kind neighbor, who, knowing or guessing her need, had thus silently relieved her. As the day wore away their excitement knew no bounds, and Grace cautiously visited all his old haunts, dreading lest she should find him, but he was not there! Then their hearts beat high with hope, and as twilight came on they eagerly listened to every footfall, and watched every dusky form.

And the hours wore away, and again the old clock on the mantle told the hour of ten, and hope almost died within their hearts. Suddenly the well-known tread was heard on the walk, and the hearts of both leaped for joy as they noticed its firm, manly ring. Trembling like a leaf, Ethel rose to her feet as the door opened. One glance at the erect form, one beam from the bright eye, and the story was told. He was perfectly sober!

He came directly to her side. "Ethel," said he, and his voice shook strangely as he spoke, "I have tonight taken the pledge of total abstinence for life, and when I have proven that I mean to keep it, will you forgive me?"

"Oh, husband!"—and the happy wife, sobbing in her great joy, buried her head in his bosom, utterly unable to speak another word. He drew both wife and child to his heart, and for a time nothing broke the silence save the happy sobs of mother and child.

Oh, earth! were it not for thy sins and thy sorrows, how would saved souls appreciate sinless, sorrowless Heaven? Oh, sorrow, strangest gift of a wise Father, even thou art blessed in making the cup of joy that follows a draught of thy bitter waters, so passing sweet!

Need we dwell longer on this happy scene? Let us rather pass by the time the old dramseller appointed to be in possession of their humble home, and look in again upon them.

We see many an article of comfort, and even of luxury, and by the happy face of wife and child, together with his own bright eye, that he had kept his pledge.

"Ethel, dear," said he, as his wife removed the tea things of their happy meal, "I want you and Grace to take a walk with me this evening."

A glad assent is given, and they wend their way, chatting playfully as they go, till the husband pauses, and pointing upward, says, quietly: "Look there, wife!" She looks; and before her swings the handsome sign of "HILTON & HORTON, ATTORNEYS-AT-LAW."

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