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THE OLD MAN'S STORY.

A THRILLING SKETCH.

I shall never forget the commencement of the temperance reformation. I was a child at the time, of some ten years of age. Our home had every comfort, and my kind parents idolized me, their child. Wine was very often on the table, and both my father and mother gave it to me in the bosom of the morning glass.

On Sunday, at church, a startling announcement was made to our people. I knew nothing of its purport, but there was much whispering among the mob. The pastor said that on the next evening would be a meeting, and an address upon the evils of intemperance in the use of alcoholic drinks. He expressed himself ignorant of the object of the meeting, and could not say what course it would be best to pursue in the matter.

The subject of the meeting came up at our table after the service, and I questioned my father about it with all the curious eagerness of a child. The whispers and words which had been dropped in my hearing clothed the whole affair with great mystery to me, and I was all eagerness to learn of the strange thing. My father merely said it was some scheme to unite the church and state.

The night came, the groups of people gathered on the tavern steps, and I heard the feet and the laugh, and saw drunken men come reeling out of the bar-room.

I urged my father to let me go, but he at first refused. Finally, thinking it would be an innocent gratification of my curiosity, he put on his hat, and we walked across the green to the church. I well remember how the people appeared as they came in, seeming to wonder what kind of an exhibition was to come off.

In the corner was the tavern-keeper, and around him a number of his friends. For an hour the people of the place continued to come in, till there was a fair house-full. All were curiously watching the door, and apparently wondering what would appear next. The pastor stole in and took his seat behind a pillar under the gallery, as if doubtful of the propriety of being in the church at all.

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Two men finally came in and went forward to the altar and took their seats. All eyes were fixed upon them and a general stillness prevailed throughout the house.

The men were unlike in appearance, one being short, thick-set in his build, and the other tall and well formed. The younger had the manner and dress of a clergyman, a full, round face, and a quiet, good-natured look as he leisurely looked around over the audience.

But my childish interest was all in the old man. His broad deep chest and unusual height looked giant-like as he strode slowly up the aisle. His hair was white, his brow deep, seamed with furrows, and around his handsome mouth, lines of calm and touching sadness. His eyes were black and restless, and kindled as the tavern-keeper uttered a low just aloud. His lips were compressed, and a crimson flush went and came over his pale cheek. One arm was off above the elbow, and there was a wide scar over his right eye.

The younger finally rose and stated the object of the meeting, and asked if there was a clergyman present to open it with prayer. Our pastor kept his seat, and the speaker himself made a short address, at the conclusion calling on any one to make remarks. The pastor arose, under the gallery, and attacked the position of the speaker, using the arguments which I have often heard used since, and concluded by denouncing those engaged in the new movement as meddling fanatics who wished to break up the time-honored usages of good society, and injure the business of respectable people. At the conclusion of his remarks, the tavern-keeper and his friends got up a cheer, and the current of feeling was evidently against the strangers and their plan.

While the pastor was speaking, the old man had fixed his dark eyes upon him, and leaned forward to catch every word.

As the pastor took his seat, the old man arose, his tall form towering in its symmetry, and his chest swelling as he inhaled his breath through his thin, dilated nostrils. To me, at that time, there was something awe-inspiring and grand in the appearance of the old man; as he stood, with his full eye upon the audience, his teeth shut hard,

and a silence like that of death throughout the church.

He bent his gaze upon the tavern-keeper, and that peculiar eye lingered and kindled for a moment. The scar grew red upon his forehead, and beneath his heavy brows his eyes glistered and glowed like a serpent's. The tavern-keeper quailed before that searching glance, and I felt a relief when the old man withdrew his gaze. For a moment more he seemed lost in thought, and then in low and tremulous tones commenced.

There was a depth in that voice, a thrilling sweetness and pathos which riveted every heart in the church before the first period had been rounded. My father's attention had become fixed upon the eye of the speaker with an interest I had never before seen him exhibit. I can but briefly remember the substance of what the old man said, though the scene is as vivid before me as any that I ever witnessed.

"My friends! I am a stranger in your village, and I trust I may call you friends. A new star has arisen, and there is a hope in the dark night which hangs like a pall of gloom over our country."

With a thrilling depth of voice, the speaker continued, "O! God, thou who lookest with compassion upon the most erring of earth's frail children, I thank thee that a brazen serpent has been lifted up upon which the drunkard can look and be healed—that a beacon has burst out upon the darkness that surrounds him; which shall guide back to honour and heaven the bruised and weary wanderer."

It is strange what power there is in some voices. The speaker's voice was low and measured, but a tear trembled in every tone, and before I knew why, a tear dropped on my hand. The old man brushed one from his own eye, and continued:

"Men and Christians, you have just heard that I am a vagrant and a fanatic. I am not. Ah, God knows my own heart; I came here just to do good. Hear me and be just."

"I am an old man striding alone at the end of life's journey. There is a deep sorrow in my heart and tears in my eyes. I have journeyed over a beaconless ocean, and all life's bright hopes have been wrecked;