

tell you that it is the only way of escape you have."

For a moment he seemed staggered at my firm assertion. He needed firm handling, and I knew that he had a dogged will of his own, if it could only be aroused.

But the next moment, in despairing tones, he went on:—

"How can I, after training so many of my customers to take wine with me every journey? They all look for it, and I could not do my trade without it."

"Another fallacy! Depend upon it, my dear friend, if in a manly, quiet way you let them know the risk you have run, you will find that you will not lose a single customer worth having. Here and there you may lose a shaky one, but your time will be more profitably spent in seeking worthier men."

"But if I do, how can I as a commercial traveller go in and out of the hotel, sit down to dinner, or spend the night in a commercial room without drinking?"

I confess that this question was a harder one to meet at that time than it is now. It was in the days of the old wine dinners, when every man was expected to pay his share of the wine, whether he drank it or not, and do other things in the drinking line for the "good of the house." The man who shirked the dinner, i.e., "boxed Harry," as it is technically termed, or who for conscience sake refused to drink intoxicants, in those days was regarded by the elite of the road as an outer barbarian, unworthy of the commercial room, and by many of the landlords was looked at askance, treated by the waiters with a sort of ineffable scorn, and by the usually civil "boots" with contemptuous indifference! It was a trying ordeal for any man with nerves, or respect for himself, and few cared to run the gauntlet. So trying has it proved to many high-minded men, that the writer once heard Mr. Samuel Morley assert that he was exceedingly glad when the time came for him to quit the commercial room.

Thank God! those days are past. The life of a commercial will always prove an ordeal to the weak-kneed, undecided character; but if a man has the right ring of high character and indomitable pluck, he has fewer temptations to go wrong, and more help to go right, than in the old drinking day of the past, when to sit down to a wine dinner, especially on the Sunday, might mean anything between 5s. and 15s. per man. The consequences may be better imagined than described.

But to resume. My reply was: "It must be tried at any risk. You know that I am not a teetotaler myself, but if you will go in with me now, this 8th day of April, and pledge yourself to do without intoxicants of any kind for six months, I will pledge myself with you by God's help to do it. It is of little use asking you to do a thing I won't do myself."

It was a trying moment. I could see that my friend was suffering veritable agony. The sweat stood in great beads on his forehead. We took a turn or two in silence. Then pulling himself together, he remarked:—

"No half measures will save me now. I will do it!"

"Thank God!" I said. "Now come with me to dinner."

It seemed almost a mockery to ask a man in his state to dinner. But two ends were served—it prevented him going back to his own hotel with no one to help him to resist the temptation there, and it publicly committed him to the course we had taken.

I was president of the day. We sat down. I explained the circumstances, with my friend's permission, and said: "As president, I will order wine in the way you require, but I and my friend must neither touch it nor pay for it; but will pay an extra price to the landlord instead."

There was some demur, but I carried my point. I felt, I think righteously, indignant with one, who did all in his power to persuade our poor friend "to take a hair of the dog that bit him"—a piece of mischievous proverbial lore that has lured many a poor struggling wretch to his ruin.

After this I persuaded my friend to see a doctor, and then get home as quickly as possible. It was Friday afternoon, and I arranged with him to meet me on the following Monday at the Bull Hotel, Sittingbourne, so that we might travel together.

Fortunately, on leaving the hotel that memorable afternoon, he met a customer who had often drunk with him. He told him the state he was in, and the pledge he had taken. To his surprise this man, who had suffered from delirium himself, said:—"The gentleman who has persuaded you to do this is the best friend you ever had, and I know it is the only thing that can save your life."

To my great delight my friend met me on Monday. He was better, though he still felt very bad. The rest at home had somewhat steadied his nerves. A formidable difficulty presented itself. He told me that he had an appointment with one of his best customers there, which would probably take him the greater part of the day. "When dinner time comes he will ask me, as usual, to dine with him; and he generally provides an extra bottle of wine. What can I say?"

"Tell him that you are especially engaged to meet me at dinner to-day, and that I can take no excuse. But," I added, "make a clean breast of it; let him know the state you are in, and the pledge you have taken."

It happened just as he had anticipated. His client told him that he had just had in some of the best port wine he ever tasted, and remarked: "We will crack a bottle, and finish the order afterwards."

It was a great temptation, but my friend's strong will conquered, and he told his customer exactly how he stood. When he heard it, to my friend's great surprise, the generous, kind-hearted man, a true gentleman, stretched his hand across the counter, and said: "I am right glad to hear it; go and dine with your friend, and thank him for me. When you have finished come back, and I will make the order as large as I can."

This was a powerful lift. The fact was, that our friend was highly esteemed amongst the best of his customers. They had seen his danger, and were glad to help him to retain his former position.

We travelled together for some time. He took a seat in my trap, sending his luggage by rail.

Day by day he became freer from the effects of excess. Each day at dinner we had to fight the old battle over again. We were, as a matter of course, unmercifully chaffed; but I am pretty certain the wine drinkers by no means got the best of it. As a sample of its general effect: When we were dining with a large party at the old Royal Oak, Dover, the president, whom I knew well to be a sufferer, leant his head upon his hand, and in a most depressed tone ejaculated, "Well, I can only say I wish I could do the same thing."

"What," I exclaimed, "you know it does you harm, and you have not the manliness to say 'No!' Come, that is not like you, make up your mind, and join us in trying it out."

But we made no converts that journey. The whole thing seemed so startling. My friend's account of himself was listened to eagerly, and the experiment was watched with great interest. I had anticipated the greatest difficulty with the landlords and waiters. I made it a point to tell them, asking them to charge us something extra for dinner, to make up for the profit on the wine. To my surprise, on the following journey, there were notices in many of the best hotels, to the effect that "Gentlemen not taking wine at dinner will be charged one shilling extra."

This was the real beginning of the breakdown of the strict wine system on the South Coast, and with gratitude I remember—and that to the honor of the landlords—no real difficulty was placed in our way. Many, too, of our commercial friends, who felt not the slightest inclination to give up the wine themselves, when the facts of the case became known, gladly helped us all they could. As an instance of this, I may state that some two years after, as I was about to sit down to dinner in one of the best known hotels in Brighton, I told the president, a stranger to me, that I did not join in the wine. He at once, somewhat offensively, said that he could not permit me to sit down with them unless I divided with them the bill. I was saved the trouble of either protesting or retiring, for two or three voices defended me to the effect that they knew the reason I did it, and would be sorry to see me touch a glass of wine, and that if I could not sit down neither would they. The president subsided, and I quietly enjoyed my dinner.

But to resume. We travelled together till we reached Hastings, where our ways parted. I shall never forget the difference in the face of our now happy friend. Health restored, full of vigour and energy, he came to me the last night we were together that journey, in the Old Swan Hotel, at Hastings, and with a jubilant light on his countenance, said, "I have done over £250 to-day, and don't believe I could have done a tithe of it with a glass of wine in me!"

Three months after that I met him again. I have seldom seen a finer picture of rude, robust health. He was in the best of spirits, and doing a magnificent trade.

The next time I met him was in Margate, a few days before the expiration of our six months' pledge.

"Now, my friend," I said, "what about the pledge—are you going to drop it, or carry it on for ever?"

"Drop it!" he replied. "Why, if you offered me a glass of wine in one hand and a thousand pounds in the other I would drink it, I wouldn't do it. Do you know I have received no less than four letters of congratulations from the firm during the last six weeks upon the enormous increase in my returns. The best day's work they ever did for me was to put me on commission. I never made so much money in my life."

"And what about your wife and children?" I queried.

"Happy as the day is long. I never miss reaching home on Saturdays now, and Sunday is a real day of rest and thankfulness for us all. No bad headaches. Temper all right. I have a good chance of saving something for the rainy day."

For about four years we met much as usual on our journeys. The rescued man was always the same, full of fine animal spirits; busy as a bee, and the very picture of robust health. As I have said, he was a man of strong will and prompt action. But one thing very often raised in my mind strong misgivings. I knew what great danger there was when a constitution like his had once been saturated and diseased with strong drink. I had read that even John Gough, the great Temperance orator, dare never trust himself even to take the ordinary Sacramental wine, and was compelled to avoid even the smell of it to his dying day. I felt the only safety for such a man was in Christ. But my friend was not a converted man. He was a professing Christian, nothing more. My poor efforts failed to show him the difference. He trusted in his own strength, and laughed at the idea of ever going back to his old drinking habits.

But a testing time came. One morning, as he was passing down the South Eastern line, the train met with an accident. No lives were lost, but many were terribly shaken, and amongst them our friend was much unnerved. He had to lay up for a time. The family doctor insisted on his taking port wine. Alas! alas! How a valuable life has been wrecked, wives made widows, and children fatherless, by the light and careless prescription of a well-meaning family doctor, who imagines that a fire brand can be safely thrown into a building full of inflammable material!

The port wine was taken. The old devil sleeping with him was thoroughly aroused. He went from one excess to another. I met him but once after that. Oh, how changed! He avoided me by every means in his power.

In one short twelve months alcoholic liquors had done their worst, and his broken-hearted widow, with eight fatherless children, followed him to a drunkard's grave.

Verily, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

—Alliance News.

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