



A Fight Against Odds

(Kate Anderson, in the 'Union Signal.')

(Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.)

[The Kilgour family are engaged in a desperate struggle to save the idolized youngest son, Claude, from the curse of cigarette smoking. The death of his brother Willie has aroused the remnant of his manhood, and he is now himself resolved to break the habit.]

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

Now the company of the roughest men and boys in the yards amply fulfilled his social requirement. Their language and habits never disturbed him. He was quite happy in the society of the commonest Frenchmen in the yards and would have been only too glad to join them in their recreations after work-hours had he been allowed to do so. Ralph saw all this, but still he worked and prayed for better things. One day he was enabled for an hour to leave the office, where he was employed as head operator, and took a walk over the shops. It happened to be a breathing spell for a few of the hands, and Claude was finally discovered in a freight car, playing cards, and smoking a villainous pipe. That night he stoutly maintained that there was no harm in a friendly game of cards and that ordinary tobacco wouldn't hurt him. Antoine Mousseau had given it to him.

'Stop there,' said Ralph. 'I found out that you traded off your silver cuff button to Jim O'Donnolly for a supply. You came home last night and told mother you had lost it, and she had to buy you another. Claude, Claude, what hope is there for you when you will lie and steal?'

Ralph administered very potent medicine to Claude in the shape of another sound thrashing. Perhaps in some cases this might not be found to work so well, but, used as a last resort, with Claude it had always proved a beneficial measure. Ralph believed that when boundless tact, prayerful wisdom, unflinching kindness, forbearance and helpfulness all failed in their effort on a depraved or wilfully bad boy, the good old-fashioned rod of the wise Solomon's hearty recommendation possessed an unquenchable virtue even unto this day and generation.

One day Mrs. Dalton called to Claude, as he was passing to his work, and gave him two dollars to hand to the foreman, who was her landlord, this sum being the balance due on the month's rent of her cottage.

Claude took the money, and kept it until he found an opportunity to play it in a game of cards, hoping to turn from it a few dollars on his own account before handing it to the rightful owner. Though he had become an expert player, considering his age, and had often won small amounts, his play this time proved unlucky, and he lost the entire sum. He now had sufficient fear of Ralph not to trust to luck and time to straighten himself, but he went at once to Mrs. Dalton, telling her he had lost the money, but saying that if she would be so kind as to wait the few days intervening before pay-day he would make it good. Mrs. Dalton, quite unaware of the fact that Claude was not allowed to handle a cent of his pay, kindly and heartily agreed to do this, also promising not to mention the loss to anyone. It crept out, however, through the foreman's asking Dalton for the amount on pay-day, and his learning from him for the first time that Mrs. Dalton had sent the money by Claude a week before. At noon Dalton

learned from his wife of the loss and Claude's promise to pay, so when on the next day the money was not forthcoming to either landlord or to tenant, Dalton paid Foreman Miller and went to Ralph for his dues. The sum was promptly paid, with an apology for the delay, Ralph, in his wounded pride, never letting Dalton suspect that he had not been cognizant of the debt.

CHAPTER VIII.

It took some days of patient and persistent effort on Ralph's part to get at the truth concerning the little coterie who indulged in gambling during spare and noon hours, for he was rightly convinced that it was in this manner that Claude 'lost' the money. Ralph was lied to and hoodwinked by the Frenchmen who, with their characteristic shrugs, knew 'nodings,' while the English-speaking hands considered it none of their business who played cards.

In his own little ring Claude posed as an injured martyr, tyrannized over by his brother, who had succeeded in turning his family against him and in depriving him of liberty and wages. Even at his worst Claude possessed more than a remnant of the fascinating, lovable personality which had won all hearts from his babyhood, and he had not a so-called 'friend' who would not have stood up for and shielded to the death the winning-mannered, golden-haired boy.

Upon this occasion, when taxed with his theft, Claude was both rebellious and impertinent. He vowed he would no longer stand being interfered with and tyrannized over.

'Claude, it is all to help you until you get stronger, not to punish you, that you are guarded,' pleaded Alice.

'Young man,' said Ralph, 'if running away is your scheme, let me tell you that I have exhausted every means to keep you at home until you can come to your senses. I can do nothing more, nor will I try. Only let me tell you this: When you grow up the detectives and police in the country will be upon your track armed with warrants for your arrest both as a thief and a forger.'

Ralph had found a cheque, which had evidently dropped out of Claude's clothes, bearing his mother's imitated signature, most skillfully forged.

'If you have a spark of natural feeling left for your heart-broken mother and sister, spare them that.'

A heart-rending moan from his white-faced mother struck Claude to the heart. He looked at her. Two years before she had been a young-looking, pretty little woman, with tender, brown eyes sparkling with love and gaiety, with shining brown hair, pink cheeks and erect, graceful figure. Poor little mother! (Oh, poor, poor mothers and wives all over this sin-cursed nation!) Her shoulders are now stooped pathetically, her bright hair is whitened, and is drawn back from a forehead lined with anguish, the sad, lustreless eyes gaze piteously upon her boy, her cheek is white and wrinkled, and her pretty mouth droops sorrowfully.

Something of all this flashed across Claude's heart in that shamed glance—his dear mother, who had suffered such anguish for him yet never had failed in tenderest love, unflinching kindness! Claude turned away and broke into a passionate torrent of sobs: 'Oh, why don't you kill me, or turn me out, or send me to jail? I am not fit to live. I am the vilest wretch that ever breathed. There is no use in trying to do anything with me; can't you see it? I will kill myself.'

'Claude, can't you pray for yourself?' whispered Alice, softly. 'Jesus can save to the uttermost. Only place yourself, like a helpless little child, in his hands, and he will do all for you. Can you not do that?'

'I could now, and mean it, too, but tomorrow I would not care. I never can care. I want to care, and I wish I could, but I can't make things really matter to me. I would just as soon lie or steal as

not. I don't get interested in anything but smoking or talking to the train boys. You take me to church and invite nice company here for me, and put me in the way of all the good and interesting things you think will help me, but nothing seems to make any lasting impression on me. I tell you, my mind is destroyed.

The reformatory had been frequently discussed as a means of redeeming Claude. Ralph had made all the private investigations possible—had consulted the old and honored fountain-head of shrewd, kindly wisdom, Magistrate Tarblett, and had written to the rector at Penetanguishene for information as to a depraved boy's chances to be permanently reformed and become an honest member of society.

(To be continued.)

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