

ble, sensitive natures, one of those feeble physical organizations that cannot bear ridicule or excitement. Why, a glass of wine that to men of strong mind and body like you, gentlemen, would only be a little pleasant stimulus, would send the blood rushing madly through his veins and set his brain on fire. I blush for him—that he could not control his passions better, but he found that there was no safety for him save in total abstinence. For more than once his feet had stood just over the awful gulf that yawned to swallow the weak and unwary. So he promised himself, and one dearer to him than his own life, that he would forever abjure wine or any drink that can intoxicate. And so that Christmas eve, two years ago, when wine was offered, he refused to drink it. Fair ladies and brave men pressed it upon him, but with unwonted firmness he still declined. But there were two gentlemen present, both older and wiser than he—both men of influence, of talent and wealth, both his superiors, and his friends, so he thought, poor fool that I was! For Frank Rivers and Charlie Moore (you start, gentlemen, you change color now—now I come to names you see) were not friends, else they would not have whispered, “drink, Edward, it will do you good—drink, Edward, it is so odd to refuse,” and added ridicule to persuasion—would they? They knew I could not bear that and I drank. You know, gentlemen, how deeply I drank, how wildly I talked, and how my two best friends, Moore and Rivers slipped me away slyly and sent me out of town to my sister, whose heart was almost broken at the sight of me, disgraced, miserable wretch that I was. Well, sirs, that glass of wine ruined me, soul and body. That one glass of wine, that but for you, and you, sir, I should never have touched, has sent me here, my body here, my soul to its Maker, for I never will live to bear this awful disgrace. God only knows if I am guilty of this crime; if I have done this thing it was when I was stupified with drink, for as God Almighty is my witness, I know nothing at all about it. Nor am I the only victim of that fatal Christmas party. Do you remember, gentlemen, hearing that young Averill was killed in a street fight last week, in New York? And that St. John Pierce

was found with his throat cut in his prison cell, where he was sent for passing counterfeit coin? Well, sirs, they went to that party resolved, like me, to abstain from wine. We had talked it all over, we three, and made an arrangement to that effect. But through your persuasion I drank. They followed in a single glass—where was the wrong in that? Ay, sirs, they were weak like me and that glass of wine was their first step backward in the road which hurried their souls, unbidden to the judgment. They are dead! the rest remains with God.

He stopped a moment, gazing wildly at the three, who, pale and panic stricken, stood close together in one corner of the cell, dumb with sorrow, and shame, and fear. Then he went on more madly than before:

‘You, gentlemen, sit in earth’s high places, you will doubtless fill the highest offices in the State. Against me the doors of society are barred—me, the inmate of a convict’s cell. But I have shown you how I came here—why I am this hateful thing I have become. God have mercy on me! As for you—you are murderers of those two young men, and of me. Cruel, disgraceful, wicked! Here, jailor, bring your chains, your handcuffs—bind them—’

He had been growing more and more excited, and now, with a cry that smote the hearts of the listeners with horror, the poor fellow staggered forward and fell to the floor—the blood gurgled from his mouth, and flowed a crimson rivulet over his sister’s breast, for she knelt by his side, and laid his head in her arms tenderly as his mother ever folded him to her heart when he was a baby.

Edward Talbot did not then and there die within the walls of that prison cell; but after weeks of delirium and fever, during which the banner of the King of Death seemed unfurled over his sick bed, he woke one morning from a pleasant slumber in the old Moore mansion to recognize the dear faces bending over him—woke to the pleasant consciousness that his innocence of the crime charged against him had been proven to the world beyond a doubt.

But he was never well again. Though the pale cheek glowed with crimson spots, and in his eyes was unwonted