

JOURNAL OF TEMPERANCE.

A MONTHLY PERIODICAL.

BENSON.

A SOLDIER'S STORY.

The battle was over and the day was lost. The fight had been terrible. The dead and wounded lay thick on the field.— Shots were still flying, and shells screaming and bursting through our retreating ranks.

"Comrade," called a dying man, and his feeble hand took hold of one of the retreating soldiers, "Comrade!"

The soldier paused.

"Ah, Benson, God bless you! Take my pay from this pocket and send it to my mother!— She needs it. Take her letters too; I give them to you. You will find them a treasure. God reward you!"

The wounded soldier lay back to die, and his comrade passed on—a more thoughtful man for that trust—for those few dying words. So much is sometimes centered in so little.

Benson had been a reckless, desperate man. An orphan from his birth, cast loose upon the world to fight his way through it among the base, the grasping and selfish, he had grown selfish and fierce. He had despised law, defied restraint, and followed his own strong will without fear and without principle—a reckless, dangerous man. But he was a man still. Down below the roughness, stains and crimes of years, lay a tenderness born of a gentle mother; seldom touched, but there. He had a heart in him that could be stirred by love, and trust and confidence. The trust of that dying man had moved him. He had trusted him with his last message for home; had given him his letters of affection; implored God's blessing on him. That trust was not misplaced; that confidence will not be abused; that prayer will not be unheard.

"Ah, Benson," shouted his fellows, as he joined them, "give us a share! How much of a haul this time? Fierce enough for fight; but fiercer for plunder."

"Plunder!" repeated Benson, and his eyes flashed. "Plunder? Say that again!"

"Blood's up," said one of the boldest; and no further remark was ventured.

The comrade walked on in silence. The ear-liest, and most confident look of the dying man parted at before him; his failing voice

still in his ears; his letters, his money in his bosom. His thoughts went forward to his own last hour. Would a comrade pause to hear his last words? What would they be? For whom? Who would care when he should die? Who mourn for him? For whom had he lived?— Whom had he blessed? Could he call on God for help in the final, fearful struggle? How could he appear before God in judgment?

The soldier at his side tried to rally him.

"What's the trouble, Benson?"

No answer.

Benson obeyed the request of the dying soldier. He delivered his last message; remitted his pay. Remembering the words, "She needs it," spoken so feelingly, he added to it his own pay. He had no need of it, clothed and fed as he was; no mother, nor wife, nor child to care for. Let it go to the bereaved mother. She may perhaps feel her loss somewhat the less for it. Better so, far better, than it should go in gambling or in drink. His letter closed.— "Had I not been motherless from my birth I might perhaps have been worthy to fill the place of him you mourn, to be a son to you, but I have been too abandoned. I can only offer you respect, and contribute my poor earnings for your comfort."

He read and re-read the letters given him by the departed son; so pure, so tender, so elevating. He found them a treasure, as the son had found them. They awoke in him a desire for purity; an aspiration for the better things than he had ever known; to be a better man than he had ever been. They spoiled his taste for gambling; they made him abhor villainy and arousing.

His comrades rallied him again and again.

"What ails you, Benson? Come let's have a hand at cards. It's a month since you have played."

"No," was all his answer.

"Drink with us. You don't drink now."

"No."

"Why not? Guess you're getting pious."

No answer; and they who knew him, knew better than to jest when he was silent.

A letter came for him; a letter of thanks from the bereaved mother. It was full of

gratitude and kindness. Benson's lips quivered, and he shaded his eyes with his hand, as he read:

"I shall regard you as my son. Your generosity, your filial tenderness, your sense of unworthiness, make you not unworthy in my eyes. My prayers go up to God for you! My blessing rests on you!"

Benson was indeed another man. He had new relations, new hopes, a new future. But will the change in him last? Will he not shake off his new relations? Will he not go back to his old ways?

Why should he? Were they the paths of ease and delight? Were they the paths of blessedness and peace? Were they not rough and thorny, full of pit-falls, and were not beasts of prey crouching beside them? Why should one escaped from folly again seek it? Escaped from danger, again rush into it? Escaped from death, again lie down in corruption? Will he go back? Is not virtue better than vice?— purity than villainy? love than lust? worship than blasphemy? Can he go back?

He can. Such is man's weakness, madness; such is the power of evil. Pray God he may not go back!

Pay-day came. "Now Benson, treat!" they call. "Not a red cent have you spent for weeks. You're getting stingy with your money."

Benson drew back. They rallied him again as they freely drank.

"How many boys here have mothers?" he asked, and waited.

"All!"

"Have all mothers? My poor mother needs all I have and it shall be hers. She shall not want while I riot."

Some, who had forgotten or tried to forget their mothers in want and waiting far away in their lonely homes, remembered them now, and put down their cups.— The next mail carried their welcome letters and a welcome remittance. Some laughed and a keel— "Where did you get your new mother, Benson?"

"God gave her to me," he answered, in his manifest tone, "and I'll not neglect her!"

Next day he, with other men, his timely remittance received, and then at last it came no more, she who had made him her son in place of the dead, knew