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Lazy Bill Smith.

CHAPTER I.

I don't say that Bill Smith was the laziest man that ever lived, but he was decidedly the laziest that I ever saw. And I will venture to say, further, that his name could not be found in all Peppercorbo. There was where he lived—there he lives now.

Well, Bill was a toper—for that man never existed who was too lazy to drink. Of course, he was not one of the real tear-down and drag-out sort; but then he drank hard, and was generally pretty boozey towards evening; for he was too lazy to get drunk very early in the day.

One evening, just about two years and three months ago, he was very drunk. The night was cold—the wind blew fiercely, and the light snow swept wildly over the ground, and added terror to the howlings of old Boreas. That night, Bill was full two miles from his own miserable hovel, snugly ensconced behind some old boxes and barrels, in one corner of a filthy rum shop. How he came there, so far from home, I do not know, but will guess, that he happened on board some farmer's waggon or sleigh that passed his house, and was too lazy to get out till the vehicle stopped at the little grocery. But at any rate, Bill was there, two full miles from home; the night was wild, and the rum seller wanted to shut up his groggery.

"Bill, you must clear out," said the rum-seller.

Bill made no answer.

"I say, Bill, you must clear out—go home."

Bill began to snore—he was sleepy, and tired to boot; he always was.

"Hallo, Bill—I say, come, crawl out and go home; 'tis most nine o'clock."

"Wait awhile;" said Bill, "don't be in a hurry—there's nothing gained by hurrying."

"But I must shut up, Bill, and go home. There's nothing doing here, and I can't afford the fire-wood."

Bill roused up a little—not much, but a little, and winked. Perhaps he would have said something, but just then the door opened, and a stranger walked in. He had rode a long distance, and, seeing a light in the "rummy," had called to inquire how far it was to a public house.

"Just two miles and a half," said old boozle, the rum-seller; "and her's a chap that's going c'enamost there—lives right on the road."

Bill roused up a little more; perhaps there was a chance to ride, and it would not do to lose it. After a little more ceremony, that may be imagined, and with a little assistance that Bill actually needed, the two got into the sleigh and rode off.

"I s'pose I live here," said Bill when the sleigh had got a few rods past his house. The stranger reigned up his nag, and Bill got out. He had begun to get sober, and would have thanked the gentleman for his ride, but he was really too lazy, and so he jostled back slowly to his own door, raised the latch, and went in.

CHAPTER II.

There was quite a stir in Peppercorbo the next day. A stranger had come to town, and it was pretty generally rumored that he was to deliver a temperance lecture in the village school-house. Here and there, little groups were gathered together, talking the matter over—for it was indeed something new to have a temperance lecture there; the oldest inhabitant couldn't remember the like of it. Bill's appetite, and an itching to ascertain who and what the stranger was, urged him as far as the tavern, where he arrived about noon. Of course he made one of the group there, who talked about the stranger and his business, though precious little did he do towards making up the conversation.

"Are you going to jine the new Pledge, Bill?" asked an old covey, as he entered the bar-room.

Bill didn't know exactly what answer to make, and so, true to his nature, made none at all.

"How is it, uncle Simon," continued the same voice, addressing another of the loungers, "are you goin' to jine the Thompsonians to night?—they say it's all the go down the city."

"The Thompsonians?" said uncle Simon; "I don't know—they allow steamin' it, I suppose."

Old Simon was the wit of the town, and of course this sally produced a laugh.

"Not a bit," answered a square-rigged, double-breasted fellow, who had stood in a corner of the room all the while. "I've seen 'em and hearn 'em lecture too; but they don't hold to steamin' any way, as I know; nor they ant Thompsonians neither."

"What are they, Sam?" asked uncle Simon.

"They are Washingtonians," said Sam, "and they don't hold to drinkin' a drop of liquor—"

"Afore folks," added Simon, with emphasis; and here was another laugh.

Bill heard all this, but he took no part, even in the laugh, for he was too lazy. Towards night the company dispersed, the greater portion of them to meet again at the school-house. Bill got a chance to ride, and so went to the school-house too.

The lecturer was there, and in good time began his discourse. He dwelt long on the evil consequences of intemperance; and among other things, showed that it uniformly produced laziness—the worst kind of laziness—even a disregard of those duties, on the performance of which depends cleanliness, health and happiness.

Bill heard the whole, and winked. The others heard, and looked at Bill.

Presently the Pledge went round, beginning with uncle Simon who was the oldest man and the biggest toper in the house.

"I'll sign if Bill Smith will," said Simon; "and I too," said the next—and the next—and—

"But who is Bill Smith?" asked the stranger.

"There he sits," answered one, pointing to a seat near the door; for Bill had not got far into the house—he was too lazy.

The Pledge was carried to him, and he was requested to sign it.

"I can't," said Bill, "I'm tired."

"But you must," said the stranger, "here are three more waiting for you to sign."

"Don't you see I can't," answered Bill. "And, besides, 'tisn't best to hurry; there's nothing got by hurrying. I'm tired."

"Sign, Bill," said uncle Simon; "sign, Bill, and then make a speech."

The audience laughed—Bill looked sober; he was evidently thinking about something, and this required an effort. I suspect he was thinking of the lecture, and his own laziness. Presently he spoke.

"I s'pose I might sign it, and make a speech too," he said; "for though I'm a little lazy now-a-days, seeing there's nothing to do, I used to be as smart as any fellow in Peppercorbo."

"So you was," said Simon; "now sign the Thompsonians Society, Bill, and make a speech."

"I guess, on the whole, I had better wait," said Bill; "perhaps some other time will do as well."

But the stranger insisted, for full half an hour, and strange to say, Bill finally signed the Pledge.

"And now make a speech," was the cry from every part of the house. But Bill wouldn't make a speech that night, and the other toppers wouldn't sign the Pledge till the speech had been made.

"I'll come here next Tuesday night, and make a good long speech," said Bill with more energy than he had displayed for