

having been, as he supposed, "the worse of it." Little ailments he had, and was frequently in the hands of the village doctor, who told him that he had a "sluggish liver," and treated him to occasional pill and potion, that gave temporary relief and nothing more. Mr. Graham had never suspected that his liver was injured by alcohol, but that knowledge was to come in time.

He was a coal merchant, and had a very good business. Jack Barton was his head teamster, and a very good man when not "away on the drink."

"You can take that ton of coal to the Grange, Jack," said Mr. Graham, "and be back by half past six. The meeting does not begin till eight."

"I don't promise you I will come," said Barton.

"I hope you will," replied Mr. Graham.

A few minutes before eight o'clock they both happily appeared at the schoolroom, and were early to get a very good seat. The room was completely filled, the last to appear was "Drunken Maggie," the most disreputable woman in the place, who stood in the doorway and scowled defiance at the lecturer and those who supported him on the platform.

The speaker was not a great man. He was only a dim star in the constellation of temperance lecturers now gathered in the sky, so long darkened with ignorance of the evils of drink; but he had truth to support him, and many things he spoke of struck home.

It was an old story that he told, but as good as new, for many who sat there felt it come home to themselves. Mr. Graham became thoughtful, Jack Barton attentive, and drunken Maggie ceased to scowl. The only person in the room who affected to smile at the illustrations and arguments put forward, was the landlord of "The Flapwing," who had come in to "see what it was all about;" and his smile was that of a man who is hard hit and tries to make the best of it.

"Come up and sign here," said the lecturer in conclusion. "Pledge yourselves to have no more poison, and live decent lives. Let every man and woman take the Blue Ribbon—the ribbon of sobriety, decency and thrift."

All did not go up, but more than the landlord of "The Flapwing" expected obeyed the call of the lecturer, Mr. Graham and his man, Jack Barton, being among the first. The very last to ascend the platform was drunken Maggie, whose appearance was hailed with a burst of laughter from "The Flapwing" landlord and a little knot of men around him.

"Ah! you may laugh," she said, turning to them, and pointing direct at the landlord; "but I've done with you, and when a few more follow, you may laugh in another fashion. There's my name. I sign myself out of the public-house and into a decent home again."

Drawing her rags around her, she, with her head erect, marched out of the room, and that night "The Flapwing" was quieter than it had been for months. Not half the usual customers assembled to drink their substance, their health, and their very lives away.

Drunken Maggie became sober Maggie in real earnest, and Jack Barton was a sturdy supporter of the temperance cause ere the week was out. Mr. Graham was quiet, and said little, being, as a matter of fact, not so well content with having signed the pledge. He was afraid that that liver of his would be weakened by abstinence, and he consulted the doctor upon it. The doctor told him that he could have alcohol prescribed for him. "And I recommend," he said with a smile, "that you have a glass of port wine at eleven, and another with your dinner, and perhaps a little negus just before going to bed."

Mr. Graham went home but imperfectly relieved. He doubted if the prescription was an honest one. The force of habit, however, and a liking for drink, which he never suspected was in him, helped the doctor.

In the morning he put a glass of port wine into a physic bottle, and went down to the yard, where he helped Barton and others to weigh out some coals. It was a warm day, and taking off his coat he hung it on a nail in the wall.

By-and-by the longing came upon him, and with a sheepish face he looked at his watch.

"Nearly eleven o'clock," he said; "it's time I took my physic."

"Liver still bad, master?" said Jack.

"Yes," said Mr. Graham; and going over to his coat, took out the bottle.

He was about to raise it to his lips, when Jack Barton came forward with a mug in his hand.

"My liver's uncommon bad too, master," he said, "and I'll take

a drop."

"But it isn't prescribed for you," said Mr. Graham, with a very guilty countenance.

"If two people have got the same complaint," insisted Jack, "only one need go to the doctor. Money can be saved that way. Come, master, in the old days you gave me a glass of beer when I asked for it. You won't refuse me physic now."

"I'd rather not, Jack," said Mr. Graham.

"If you don't master, I shall suspect that you are not keeping the pledge. We signed out and out to keep it together, and if the doctor says drink is good for you, why shouldn't it be good for me?"

"You never touched it, Jack?"

"Not I, master. I signed not to do it."

"Barton," said Mr. Graham, "it is you who are the master, and I the man. You rule your appetites, and I'm a slave to 'em. But I'll be master now. Good or bad for me, doctor against or for it, I'll have none of it;" and with great force he dashed the bottle against the wall, shivering it to fragments.

"If you hadn't done that or something like it," said Jack Barton, "I'd have broken the pledge too, and gone off for the day, I would; because I was angry to see you wasn't quite straight, and when a man's angry, he often does foolish things."

"Trust me, Jack," said Mr. Graham; "I've done with it now. I owe you something for the good turn you've done me this morn'ing."

They worked on, Jack Barton in a quietly triumphant spirit, and Mr. Graham good-humoredly. The liver complaint was quite forgotten by the time the dinner hour came; and leaving the yard, the coal dealer walked homeward.

As he entered the main street of the village, he met the now sober Maggie, already the better in appearance for sobriety, going homeward too. She was a widow, with two children, who, at one time, lived, like the birds, on what they could pick up; but now she had a loaf of bread and the remnant of a cold joint, which some friend had given her, in her apron.

"That you, Maggie?" he said.

"Yes, master," she said.

"What have you got there? Anything from the public house?"

"No," she said, smiling; "and yet perhaps it is. A few days ago this loaf would have gone to 'The Flapwing,' but now I'm taking it home to the children."

"And you've touched no strong drink lately?" he asked.

"Mercy on me, no," exclaimed the woman, with a shocked look on her face; "don't you call to mind that I'm pledged?"

The moderate drinker, once so proud of being able to take a little, felt still more humiliated in the presence of this woman, whom he must look upon as the vilest of the vile, as a human scare-crow, as a thing too loathsome to touch. SHE had not trifled with the pledge, while he had sought by a sophistry, alas! too common, to evade it.

"Perhaps," he said, in a low voice, "you did not miss your drink."

"Master," she said, with a passionate movement of her hand, "I suffered tortures. I felt as if I could NOT live without it for the first three days. Something stronger than chains seemed to be trying to drag me to the public house, but I put a strong grip on my pledge, and I prayed and prayed like the sinful woman I am, in a poor, broken way, and I was saved. Not miss my drink, sir? I had been living on it, if the life I led could be called living."

"Was it so bad as that?" he asked.

"Worse than I can tell you," she answered; "for I'm an ignorant woman, and can't put my feelings into words. The craving was ALMOST as horrible in its way as the feelings I used to have after days of drink—the time when I was MAD, and saw creeping things on the walls, and had evil spirits whispering in my ears that I had better kill my children and myself, and end it. You have never been a drunkard and don't know what you are talking about when you ask me if I missed my drink."

"But sober man as I professed myself, one who was a drunkard has shamed me," he rejoined. "Do you miss your drink now?"

"Thank God, no," Maggie said, with a fervor that was intense, even to the verge of declamation; "and what's more, I loathe the thought of it."

And then they parted, and he went home glad, as few men are, that he had been humiliated.

"I'll have no more dallying with friend and foe," he said, "but stand to my colors or die."

And he has been true to his word for months without dying—nay more, he is a better and a stronger man; and the doctor has lost a patient, as well as "The Flapwing" a customer. The doc-