

The pastor rose from his seat, and attacked the positions of the speaker, using the arguments which I have often heard since from many others, by denouncing those engaged in the new movement as meddling fanatics, who wished to break up the time-honoured usages of good society, and injure the business of respectable men. At the conclusion of his remarks, the tavern-keeper and his friends got up a cheer, and the current of feeling was evidently against the strangers and their plan.

While the pastor was speaking, the old man had fixed his dark eye upon him, and leaned forward as if to catch every word.

As the pastor took his seat the old man arose, his tall form towering in its symmetry, and his chest swelling as he inhaled his breath through his thin dilated nostrils. To me, at that time, there was something awe-inspiring and grand in the appearance of the old man, as he stood with his full eye upon the audience, his teeth shut hard, and a silence like that of death throughout the assembly.

He bent his eye upon the tavern-keeper, who quailed before that searching glance, and I felt a relief when the old man withdrew his gaze. For a moment he seemed lost in thought, and then in a low and tremulous voice commenced. There was a depth in that voice, a thrilling pathos and sweetness, which riveted every heart in the house before the first period had been rounded. My father's attention had become fixed on the speaker with an interest which I had never before seen him exhibit. I can but briefly remember the substance of what the old man said, though the scene is as vivid before me as any that I ever witnessed.

"My friends!—I am a stranger in your village, and I trust I may call you friends—a new star has risen, and there is hope in the dark night, which hangs like a pall of gloom over our country." With a thrilling depth of voice the speaker continued: "O God, Thou who lookest with compassion upon the most erring of earth's children, I thank Thee that a brazen serpent has been lifted, upon which the drunkard can look and be healed; that a beacon has burst out upon the darkness that surrounds him, which shall guide back to honour and heaven the bruised and weary wanderer!"

It is strange what power there is in some voices. The speaker was slow and measured, but a tear trembled in every tone; and before I knew why, a tear dropped upon my hand, followed by others like rain drops.—The old man brushed one from his own eyes, and continued:—

"Men and Christians—You have just heard that I am a vagrant and fanatic! I am not. As God knows my own sad heart, I came here to do good. Hear me, and be just.

"I am an old man, standing alone at the end of life's journey! There is a deep sorrow in my heart and tears in my eyes. I have journeyed over a dark and beaconless ocean, and all life's hopes have been wrecked! I am without friends, home, or kindred upon earth, and look with longing to the rest of the night of death. Without friends, kindred, or home! It was not so once."

No one could withstand the touching pathos of the old man. I noticed a tear trembling on the lid of my father's eye, and I no more felt ashamed of my own.

"No, my friends, it was not so once. Away over the dark waves which have wrecked my hopes, there is the blessed light of happiness and home! I reach again convulsively for the shrines of the household idols that once were mine, now mine no more!"

The old man seemed looking away through fancy upon some bright vision, his lips apart, and his fingers extended. I involuntarily turned in the direction where it was pointed, dreading to see some shadow invoked by its magic movements.

"I once had a mother! With her old heart crushed with sorrows she went down to her grave. I once had a wife!—a fair, angel-hearted creature as ever smiled in an earthly home. Her eyes as mild as a summer sky, and her heart as faithful and true as ever guarded and cherished a husband's love. Her blue eyes grew dim as the floods of sorrow washed away its brightness, and the living heart I wrung until every fibre was broken? I once had a noble, brave, and a beautiful boy! but he was driven out from the ruins of his home, and my old heart yearns to know if he yet lives! I once had a babe; a sweet tender blossom; but my hand betrayed it, and it liveth with One who loves children.

"Do not be startled, friends; I am not a murderer in the common acceptance of the term. Yet there is a light in my evening sky. A spirit mother rejoices over the return of her prodigal son! The wife smiles upon him who again turns back to virtue and honour! The child-angel visits me at nightfall, and I feel the hallowing touch of a tiny palm upon my feverish cheek! My brave boy, if he yet lives, would forgive the sorrowing old man for the treatment which drove him into the world, and the blow that maimed him for life! God forgive me for the ruin I have brought upon me and mine!"

He again wiped a tear from his eye. My father watched him with a countenance unusually excited by some strong emotion.

"I was once a fanatic, and madly followed the malign light which led me to ruin. I was a fanatic when I sacrificed my wife, children, happiness, and home to the accursed demon of the bowl. I once adored the gentle being whom I injured—so deeply.

"I was a drunkard! From respectability and affluence I plunged into degradation and poverty. I dragged my family down with me. For years

I saw my wife's cheek pale, and her step grow weary. I left her alone amid the wreck of her home idols, and rioted at the tavern. She never complained, yet she and her children went hungry for bread!

"One New Year's night I returned late to the hut where charity had given us roof. She was yet up, and shivering over the coals. I demanded food, but she burst into tears, and told me there was none. I fiercely ordered her to get some. She turned her eyes sadly upon me, the tears falling fast over her pale cheek. At this moment the child in the cradle awoke, and sent up a famishing wail, startling the despairing mother like a serpent's sting.

"We have no food, James—have had none for several days! I have nothing for the babe! My once kind husband, must we starve?"

"That sad pleading face, and those straining eyes, and the feeble wail of the child, maddened me, and I—yes, I struck her a fierce blow in the face, and she fell forward upon the hearth! The furies of hell boiled in my bosom, and with deeper intensity as I felt I had done wrong. I had never struck Mary before, but now some terrible impulse bore me on, and I stooped as well as I could in my drunken state, and clenched both hands in her hair!

"God of mercy, James!" exclaimed my wife, as she looked up in my fiendish countenance; "you will not kill us—you will not harm Willie!" and she sprang to the cradle, and grasped him in her embrace. I caught her again by the hair, and dragged her to the door, and as I lifted the latch, the wind burst in with a cloud of snow. With the yell of a fiend I still dragged her on, and hurled her into the darkness and storm! With a wild Ha! ha! I closed the door and turned the button, her pleading moans mingled with the wails of the blast, and sharp cry of her babe! But my work was not complete.

"I turned to the little bed where lay my elder son, and snatched him from his slumbers, and against his half-awakened struggles, opened the door and thrust him out! In the agony of fear he called to me by a name I was no longer fit to bear, and locked his fingers in my side pocket. I could not wrench that frenzied grasp away, and with the coolness of a devil as I was, shut the door upon his arm, and with my knife severed it at the wrist!"

The speaker ceased a moment, and buried his face in his hands, as if to shut out some fearful dream, and his deep chest heaved like a storm-swept sea. My father had arisen from his feet, and was leaning forward, his countenance bloodless, and the large drops standing up on his brow. Chills crept back to my young heart, and I wished I was at home. The old man looked up, and I never have since beheld such mortal agony pictured upon a human face as there was on his.

"It was morning when I awoke, and the storm had ceased, but the cold was intense. I first secured a drink of water, and then looked in the accustomed place for Mary. As I missed her, for the first time, a shadowy sense of some horrible nightmare began to dawn upon my wondering mind. I thought I had had a dreadful dream, but I involuntarily opened the door with a shuddering dread. As the door opened, the snow burst in, followed by the fall of something across the threshold, scattering the snow, and striking the floor with a sharp, hard sound. My blood shot like red-hot arrows through my veins, and I rubbed my eyes to shut out the sight. It was—it—O God! how horrible! it was my own injured Mary and her babe frozen to ice! The ever true mother had bowed herself over the child or shield it, her own person stark and bare to the storm! She had placed the hair over the face of the child, and the sleet had frozen it to the white cheek! The frost was white in its half-opened eyes, and upon its tiny fingers. I know not what became of my brave boy!"

Again the old man bowed his head and wept, and all that were in the house wept with him. My father sobbed like a child. In tones of low and broken pathos, the old man concluded:—

"I was arrested, and for long months raved in delirium. I awoke, was sentenced to prison for ten years, but no tortures could have been like those I endured within my own bosom. O God, no—I am not a fanatic! I wish to injure no one; but while I live, let me strive to warn others not to enter the path which has been so dark and fearful to many. I would see my wife and children beyond the vale of tears."

* * * * *

The old man sat down, but a spell as deep and strong as that wrought by some wizard's breath, rested upon the audience. Hearts could have been heard in their beating, and tears seen to fall. The old man then asked the people to sign the pledge. My father leaped from his seat and snatched at it eagerly. I had followed him, and as he hesitated a moment, with pen in the ink, a tear fell from the old man's eye on the paper.

"Sign it, sign it, young man! Angels would sign it. I would write my name there ten thousand times in blood, if it would bring back my loved and lost ones!"

My father wrote "MORTIMER HUDSON!" The old man looked, wiped his tearful eyes, and looked again, his countenance alternately flushed with a red and death-like paleness.

"It is—no, it cannot be—yet how strange," muttered the old man. "Pardon me, sir, but that was the name of my brave boy!"

My father trembled, and held up the left arm from which the hand had been severed.