

her aunt. But when she became a member she felt it her duty to make some protest against what she felt to be sinful indifference to a great cause.

First of all she spoke to the minister.

'There is no cause I have deeper at heart,' he replied. Some of his teetotal members had often wished it was nearer the surface. 'But, unfortunately, the way is not clear just now to do any organized work in that direction.'

'You see, our hands and our nights are full,' he continued, running over a list of engagements, 'and really the young people ought not to be out so much.'

'But do you not think one of the meetings you have mentioned might be set aside for this greater work?' suggested Maggie.

'Which?' he answered, a little sharply. 'Would you propose to the young people that they should do away with their musical society? Why, it is the only recreation some of them get, to say nothing of the help it so frequently affords to the church. Or that the young men should disband their literary society, which is such a great source of benefit to them? As for the rest, they are nearly all directly religious.'

Miss Allen retired from the controversy worsted in the fight, and feeling herself to be a narrow-minded monster even to have thought of such a thing.

III.

'Alice,' said Miss Allen to her friend, a few months later, 'I wish you would introduce me to some of the temperance members of the church. You said there were so many.'

Alice gave her a look of comical surprise. 'So there are,' she answered. 'Their name is Legion. Ask me to introduce you to the non-abstaining members, and it will not take so long.'

'I do not mean mere abstainers. I suppose our minister is that, but people who think it a Christian's duty to work in the temperance cause.'

'What a girl you are! Always harping on one string. But I will gratify you at the first opportunity.'

That opportunity occurred the next evening, after the week-night service.

'Mr. Bowyer,' said Alice, 'I want to introduce you to my friend Miss Allen, who is literally burning with zeal for teetotalism. She is just consuming herself away for lack of some inflammable natures to ignite.'

The gentleman addressed, who might have been called old by critics of sixteen, and young by men of sixty, shook hands pleasantly and was about to say something polite, when he was interrupted by a bass voice behind saying:

'Please introduce me, too, Miss Conway. A burning teetotaler is a sight worth seeing in this church.'

'Now, Mr. Smithson, don't begin to grumble,' said Alice, while Mr. Bowyer stood aside to enjoy the joke.

'This gentleman, Maggie, is one of those I told you about who were agitating for a temperance society a short time ago.'

Maggie looked with interest at one of the 'old fogies.'

'How was it you were not successful?' she asked.

'Because there is no temperance zeal amongst the abstainers,' replied Mr. Bowyer.

'It's just crowded out,' said Mr. Smithson. 'Monthly meetings have been started several times and failed for want of support.'

'Perhaps as a church you have been happily free from any of the terrible effects of drinking?'

'Indeed, we have not! Only a few years

ago one of our best loved deacons fell to a grievous depth. At this present time there are at least three members who are well known to take too much; if reports be true there are several others.'

'Surely,' said Miss Allen, 'with such cases before you, you ought to be earnestly fighting against the drinking custom.'

'But what can you do,' said Mr. Bowyer, 'against the indifference of your friends and the opposition of your foes? The friends tell you that there is no time for it, that other and grander works demand their zeal. The foes say it is a social question outside the range of the Church of Christ. And yet a greater obstacle lies in the fact that we admit into our fellowship those who are ruining hundreds by the sale of it.'

'But surely if you talked to our minister as you are talking to me he would make a stir in the matter?'

'I presume you have not yet made the attempt yourself,' said Mr. Bowyer, with amusement.

Miss Allen reluctantly admitted that she had. He laughed.

'And did you not find with regard to this question that his heart was made of asbestos or some other fireproof material?'

'But I do not think that ought to make any difference,' she persisted. 'I used to belong to a church where the minister and deacons were bitter opponents of total abstinence. Yet we managed to start a weekly temperance meeting, and in course of time we converted our minister, added some teetotals to the deaconate, and to-day total abstinence is one of the strong points in that church. Surely what was done in a small church could be more easily done in a large one, especially as you have the minister and some of the deacons on your side.'

The gentlemen shook their heads. They were inclined to be pessimistic.

'I suppose you will think me very presumptuous,' continued the young lady, 'but your inactivity seems to me very wrong. "If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small."'

'Ah! you have never been tried as we have,' said these wise men, shaking their heads again. 'If the church refuses to have the temperance question brought before it, it must take the responsibility, that's all.'

'But you and I belong to this church, therefore it is our responsibility, and we ought not to rest until we have brought all the other members to our way of thinking. How many are there, do you think, who feel strongly on the subject?'

Mr. Smithson said half a dozen, but Mr. Bowyer declared he knew at least twenty.

'Could you give me their names and addresses?'

'Not just this minute, but I can send them to you to-morrow,' replied the polite Mr. Bowyer.

'Thank you. I should like to call upon them, and see how much fire we can produce between us. There ought to be enough to illumine the whole church and school.'

'You want a big fire to warm the regions of the North Pole, you know,' said Mr. Smithson, as he bade the ladies good-night.

But as he walked home in company with Mr. Bowyer he confessed to feeling a little warmer and more hopeful already.

'If that girl attempts to do anything,' he said, 'I mean to help her, in spite of all I have said about its uselessness.'

And Mr. Bowyer answered: 'So will I. There is a great work to be done amongst our fellow members. We are altogether at fault that we have been so long idle.'

IV.

During the next month Miss Allen was

busy with her self-imposed task. She found Mr. Smithson was nearer the mark than Mr. Bowyer. There were not a half-dozen enthusiasts. The rest declared themselves 'in full sympathy,' but it was not of an active kind.

However, she managed at last to get sixteen promises of help, should she succeed in starting a temperance society, and then she paused and thought seriously. She was not conscious of any special talent in any direction.

'I cannot sing,' she mused, 'nor speak, nor even pray more than a few disjointed sentences in public, but most likely these sixteen can do all this and more. I can at least do the drudgery that attends the getting up and keeping on of meetings, and if I can manage so that the others have just the sort of work that they like to do, then I daresay they will keep on steadily.'

She did not mean to be sarcastic, even in thought, she was judging from past experience. The first thing to do was to get a night, and this was a difficult matter. Abstainer and non-abstainer both agreed that however desirable a temperance meeting might be, it was impossible to squeeze it in.

'The only way will be to disband some society already in existence,' said the minister loftily, when he was again referred to.

But Miss Allen instead of being quenched began attending and studying the different societies with a view to finding out which could be most profitably disposed of, wisely holding her tongue in the meanwhile.

She at length decided that the mutual improvement society might easily be merged into a weekly temperance meeting, and the gain be all on the young men's side. As it then existed it scarcely fulfilled its mission, for the young men themselves did very little towards their mutual edification, generally getting speakers from outside. But to convince yourself is not always to convince others. Of course the young men did not see it.

'It would spoil the whole thing,' they said. And the abstainers thought the young men would spoil the meeting if, as Miss Allen hinted, they should write papers and give speeches.

Altogether it seemed an impracticable suggestion, and a great deal of cold water was procured to drown it. But if Margaret Allen lacked showy talents she possessed one useful one, the talent for 'pegging away.' She was determined not to rest until the temperance work should be crowded in somehow.

Quietly and persistently she pursued her way. Never showing any weariness in going over the same arguments with the same people again and again. Never betraying any contempt for their illogical reasoning. Never losing an opportunity even of giving away a temperance tract.

They called her 'the girl with one idea.' But a constant dropping will wear away the hardest stone. Gradually her scheme grew to be regarded first, as one of the possible things, then as probable, finally it reached the actual.

When Miss Allen left that church ten years later to go to another part of England, she left a flourishing temperance society doing real work in the surrounding neighbourhood. It had a literature department to bring various temperance magazines and books before the members, a saving society to compete with the goose clubs, and the average attendance was large, numbering many noted converts, for whose sake the weekly meetings were made a pleasure to look forward to.

It possessed able officers, most of whom had been members of the mutual improve-