

THE JADA TEMPERANCE ADVOCATE,

DEVOTED TO

TEMPERANCE, EDUCATION, AGRICULTURE AND NEWS.

VOL. IX.

NOVEMBER 15, 1843.

No 14.

Alice Grey; or, the Inebriate's Daughter.

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It was a bleak, dreary evening in March. The wind whistled mournfully, and a shower of mingled rain and sleet was falling upon the now almost deserted streets of the city of M——. In a large and scantily furnished apartment, beside a cheerless fire, sat Mrs. Grey, busily plying her needle. A lamp burned upon a small table near her, and opposite her sat a young girl bending over her work, and apparently lost in thought.

"This is a wild night," said Mrs. Grey, breaking the deep silence which pervaded the apartment, and drawing her shawl still closer around her shoulders; "our fire is getting low, Alice, and it grows cold here very fast."

Alice laid aside her needle-work and stirred open the half-dying embers. The last fuel which they possessed was in the grate, and as the fire blazed with a sickly glare, she sighed and threw a low chair on which her little brother Willie sat, still closer to her, and rested his curly head upon her lap.

"Will father come to-night?" asked Willie, looking up inquiringly into her face.

Alice did not reply, but Willie saw that her eyes were filled with tears as she resumed her work, and he said no more.

"If father would only sign the Temperance Pledge!" said Willie, raising his dark eyes to Mrs. Grey's face, "that would make you happy, wouldn't it, mother?"

"Yes, Willie, that would make us all happy," she replied with a sigh.

At this instant a heavy step was heard in the adjoining passage.

"He is coming!" whispered Willie, as he instinctively crept closer to his mother and sister.

The door opened, and a man past the middle age entered. He took in silence the chair which Alice offered him, and cast his eyes around the apartment.

"What! no fire!" he said at length, "get some more wood, Alice."

"There is no more, father," replied Alice, as she placed his scanty supper upon the table, and arranged it with care.

"There, that will do," said Mr. Grey, as he drey his chair toward the table, "now get your cloak, Alice, you must go over to Mr. Osborne's to-night."

"Not to-night, William?" said Mrs. Grey, mildly.

"Yes, to-night, she can go now as well as any time, and this letter must be sent to-night."

Mrs. Grey knew it would be of no use to say more, and Alice, taking the letter from her father's hand, tied on her cloak and hood to depart.

"Wrap your cloak closely around you, Alice," said Mrs. Grey, as she held the lamp for her daughter to descend the ruinous flight of stairs that led from their humble abode into the open court beneath.

"We are indeed wretched," thought she, as she reached Mr. Osborne's door and paused to take breath. A bright light was shining through the half-closed blinds, and Alice heard the sound of happy voices, as she gently tapped at the door. It was opened by Mr. Osborne, who uttered an exclamation of surprise at seeing Alice there.

"Come in, my child," he said kindly, "this is a bitter storm, and you look wet and cold."

Alice followed him into the pleasant parlor where the family were assembled, and Mrs. Osborne placed a chair for her beside the bright fire.

"No, take my seat," cried little Ellen, springing from her chair, "mine is the warmest corner, and you can dry your feet best here."

Alice smiled as she accepted the proffered seat, but her eyes instantly filled with tears, as she heard Ellen innocently whisper to her sister Julia, "Look at her shoes, Julia; they are full of holes; her father is a drunkard, isn't he?"

A reproving look from Julia hushed the little prattler, who, perceiving that Alice had heard her words, rose to her, and threw her arms around her neck, exclaiming, "You must not look so sorry; I did not mean any harm, indeed I did not."

"You have not done any harm," said Alice, resuming her usual placidity, and drawing her father's letter from her bosom.

Mr. Osborne took it, and cast his eyes over the contents. Alice, who was eagerly watching his countenance, perceived a smile of pleasure pass over it, as he read, and he unconsciously murmured, "It cannot be that he is sincere in all this, it would be a happy thing if he were."

"What can it be?" thought Alice, as he folded the letter and placed it in his pocket.

"Tell your father, Alice, that I will call upon him early to-morrow morning, and will assist him all that is in my power; and if he is really sincere, as I shou'd judge from the letter, there are bright days in store for you all."

A thrill of joy shot through the heart of the inebriate's daughter, and she unconsciously murmured a prayer that it might be so.

The clock struck nine as she ascended the stairs, and opened the door of her father's humble abode. Her mother was still engaged with her needle work, and her father sat leaning his head upon the table. He arose as she entered, saying, "Well, Alice, what did Mr. Osborne say?"

Alice related what had passed, to which Mr. Grey listened in silence, and again resting his head upon the table, seemed unconscious of what was passing around. The next morning, when Alice arose, she was surprised to find a bright fire which her father had kindled, with some wood which he had procured. He soon entered, and Alice observed that there was a marked difference in his appearance from what she had been accustomed to see.

"You work too hard, Mary," said he, turning to his wife, "you are killing yourself by such untiring labor; cheer up, our prospects are brighter than they have been for years."

A gleam of hope filled Mrs. Grey's heart. His voice was kinder than it had been for a long time, and she raised her eyes with a smile of joy, as she said, "How so, William?"

"I am a WASHINGTONIAN!" replied Mr. Grey, "I have this morning signed the PLEDGE, and I pray that I may never break it."

Mrs. Grey uttered an exclamation of joy, while Alice could scarcely express her happiness. Willie clapped his hands, exclaiming, "Have you, father, have you signed the pledge? and I can sit upon your knee now, father, and you won't be cross again?"