

# Canada Temperance Advocate.

*Temperance is the moderate use of things beneficial, and abstinence from things hurtful.*

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## WHAT A CURSE! OR, JOHNNY HODGES THE BLACKSMITH.

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"The doctor is a kind man," said Johnny Hodges, addressing a person of respectable appearance, who was in the act of returning to his pocket book a physician's bill, which the blacksmith did not find it convenient to pay. "The doctor is a kind man, a very kind man, and has earned his money, I dare say, and I don't begrudge him a shilling of it all; but, for all that, I have not the means of paying his bill, nor any part of it, just now." "Well, well," said the collector, "I shall be this way before long, and will call on you again."

Johnny Hodges thanked him for the indulgence, and proceeded with his work; but the hammer swung heavily upon the anvil, and many a long sigh escaped, before the job in hand was fairly turned off.

Three or four times already, the collector had paid a visit at the blacksmith's shop, who was always ready to admit the justice of the claim, and that the doctor had been very kind and attentive, and had well earned his money; but Johnny was always behindhand; and, though full of professions of gratitude to the good doctor, yet the doctor's bill seemed not very likely to be paid. Familiarity, saith the proverb, breeds contempt. This old saw is not apt to work more roughly, in any relation of life, than between the creditor, or the creditor's agent, and the non-performing debtor. The pursuing party is apt to become importunate, and the pursued to grow gradually callous and indifferent. Upon the present occasion, however, the collector, who was a benevolent man, was extremely patient and forbearing. He had sufficient penetration to perceive, that poor Johnny, for some cause or other, was always exceedingly mortified and pained, by these repeated applications. It did not, however, escape the suspicion of the collector, that there might be a certain, secret cause, for Johnny's inability to pay the doctor's bill. Intemperance is exhibited, in a great variety of modifications. While some individuals are speedily roused into violent and disorderly action, or hushed to slumber, and reduced to the condition of a helpless and harmless mass; others, provided by nature with heads of iron and leathern skins, are equally intemperate, yet scarcely, for many years, present before the world the slightest personal indication of their habitual indulgence.

Johnny Hodges was an excellent workman, and he had abundance of work. It was not easy to account for such an appropriation of his earnings, as would leave him not enough for the payment of the doctor's bill, upon any other supposition, than that of a wasteful employment of them, for the purchase of strong drink. Johnny's countenance, to be sure, was exceedingly pale and sallow; but the pale-faced tippler is, by no means, an uncommon spectacle. On the other hand, Johnny was very industrious, constantly in his shop in working hours, and always busily employed.

After an interval of several weeks, the collector called again, and put the customary question, "Well, Mr. Hodges, can you pay the doctor's bill?" Perhaps there was something unusually hurried or importunate, or Johnny so thought, in the manner of making the inquiry. Johnny was engaged in turning a shoe, and he hammered it entirely out of shape. He laid down his hammer and tongs, and, for a few seconds, rested his cheek upon his hand. "I don't know how I can pay the doctor's bill," said Johnny Hodges. "I've nothing here in the shop but my tools and a very little stock; and I've nothing at home but the remainder of our scanty furniture. I know the doctor's bill ought to be paid, and if he will take it, he shall be welcome to our cow, though I have five little children who live upon the milk." "No, no, Hodges," said the collector, "you are much mistaken, if you think the doctor,

who is a Christian and a kind-hearted man, would take your cow, or oppress you at all for the amount of his bill. But how is it that you, who have always so much work, have never any money?" "Ah, sir," said Johnny Hodges, while he wiped the perspiration from his face, for he was a hard-working man; "Ah, sir," said he, "what a curse it is!—can nothing be done to put a stop to this intemperance? I hear a great deal of the efforts that are making; but still the rum business goes on. If it were not for the temptation to take strong drink, I should do well enough; and the good doctor should not have sent twice for the amount of his bill. Very few of those who write and talk so much of intemperance, know any thing of our trials and troubles." I confess," said the collector, "that I have had my suspicions and fears before. Why do you not resolve that you will never touch another drop? Go, Hodges, like a man, and put your name to the pledge; and pray God to enable you to keep it faithfully." "Why, as to that, sir," said the blacksmith, "the pledge will do me no good; the difficulty doesn't lie there. What a curse! Is there no prospect of putting an end to intemperance?" "To be sure there is," replied the collector. "If people will sign the pledge, and keep it too, there is no difficulty." "But suppose they will not sign the pledge," rejoined Johnny Hodges, "still, if rum were not so common as it is, and so easily obtained, the temptation would be taken away." "That is all very true, but it is every man's duty to do something for himself," replied the collector. "I advise you to sign the pledge, as soon as possible." "Why, sir," said the blacksmith, "the difficulty does not lie there, as I told you; I signed the pledge long ago, and I have kept it well. I never was given to taking spirit in my life. My labour at the forge is pretty hard work, yet I take nothing stronger for drink than cold water." I am sorry that I misunderstood you," replied the collector. "But since you do not take spirit, and your children, as you have led me to suppose, are of tender years; why are you so anxious for the suppression of intemperance?" "Because," said poor Johnny Hodges after a pause, and with evident emotion, "to tell you the plain truth, it has made my home a hell, my wife a drunkard, and my children beggars! Poor things," said he, as he brushed away the tears, "they have have no mother any more. The old cow that I offered you just now for the doctor's debt,—and I believe it would have broken their hearts to have parted with old Brindle,—is more of a mother to them now than the woman who brought them into this world of trouble. I have little to feed old Brindle with; and the children are running here and there for a little swill and such matters, to keep her alive. Even the smallest of these poor things will pick up a bunch of hay or a few scattered corn-stalks, and fetch it to her, and look on with delight to see her enjoy it. I have seen them all together, when their natural mother, in a drunken spree, has driven them out of doors, flying for refuge to the old cow, and lying beside her in the shed. What a curse it is!

"What will become of them and of me," continued this broken-hearted man, "I cannot tell. I sometimes fear that I shall lose my reason, and be placed in the mad-house. Such is the thirst of this wretched woman for rum, that she has repeatedly taken my tools and carried them five or six miles, and pawned or sold them for liquor. The day before yesterday I carried home a joint of meat for dinner. When I went home tired and hungry at the dinner hour, I found her drunk and asleep upon the floor. She had sold the joint of meat, and spent the money in rum. It's grievous to tell such matters to a stranger, but I can't bear that you or the good doctor should think me ungrateful any longer. I never shall