

The Making of a Temperance Fanatic

(George Edward Day, in 'Zion's Herald'.)

I have just returned from the most remarkable temperance meeting I ever attended. I have just listened to the most remarkable temperance address ever delivered. The speaker was a woman that I knew five years and more ago as a frail, diffident creature, but with a lofty spirit and a passionate earnestness. In fact, it was just five years ago to-night that I sat with her in her modest sitting-room in East Lynn, when the great tragedy of her life reached its climax. That was before she was known as Mrs. Wentworth, the Temperance Fanatic. That was before she moved strong men at will by her peerless logic and her wonderfully sad-sweet voice.

I remember well the scene in her sitting-room that early autumn evening. Two beautiful children, a boy and a girl, clung to her side, as she sat in a low willow rocker and entertained me with her bright talk while a happy light played on her face. She had married rather young—at twenty—Jack Wentworth, a free-hearted, careless fellow two years older. Somehow she never discovered until after they were married that Jack was fond of his glass occasionally, and when she did discover it, though it gave her a little pang of regret, she set about bravely to remedy the matter, with never a fear but what she could keep her young husband from his growing habit.

But, like many another woman, she failed. Jack did not care, as he once did, to do a thing simply because it pleased her; he wanted his own way now, and he had it. Frequently he came home in a half-dazed, half-ugly condition, and the poor little wife begged and pleaded in vain for reform. Then their first child was born—a boy—and for a time Jack seemed more like the old Jack, and his little wife thought the victory was won. Not so. After a while he returned to his old ways again, only with this change—his fits of intoxication became more frequent and more gross. This continued for two years or more, and then with the coming of another little stranger—a girl this time—his wife hoped again to win him from his intemperate ways. But all in vain. The new little angel in the house brought no change to the wretched father, but he kept on in sin and sank deeper and deeper in the mire.

The little home, once so happy, showed traces of the pinching fingers of poverty. Often there was very little to eat, and in the cold days of winter sometimes no fuel for the kitchen stove. Poor Jack was drinking heavily. He never was really brutal to his family, but he seldom came home sober, and often in a surly mood. But the poor man was not the only one to blame. He had inherited a weak will, and he was sorely tempted and as sorely fell.

But one night there was a change, and Jack came home sober. He had been to a new place. About nine o'clock, as he was going up Union street, he heard singing in the St. Paul's Methodist Church, and staggered up to the door. An evangelist was holding a special meeting. The sermon was over, and the congregation was singing a hymn. As Jack reached the door he heard them sing:

'Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!'

'I want to come in,' said Jack.

'No, you can't come in. You're drunk,' said the young fellow at the door, trying to block his passage.

'Oh, let him come in,' said the older man, 'let him come in.'

'You're a gentleman,' said Jack, with an uncertain accent and a lurch against the door as he endeavored to shake hands with the man who had befriended him. 'You're a gentleman! Have something on me.'

Up in front the evangelist and the pastor were urging the gospel invitation without apparent success.

'If you're a sinner and need a Saviour, Jesus Christ can save you to-night. Will you come?' pleaded the evangelist.

'I'll come!' shouted Jack, and marched down the aisle to the platform. There was a buzz and a rustle all over the church. Some thoughtless girls giggled, and an old Pharisee frowned, but the men of God on the platform climbed down to greet the prodigal.

'Could he save me, mister?' asked Jack, in a saner tone and manner. 'Do you think he could save me, sure?'

'Sure,' said the evangelist. 'He came into the world to seek and save the lost.'

'That's me, I guess,' said Jack. 'I want him to save me if he can do it right off now. I can't wait. I'm in a hurry. I've got to get home.'

The evangelist laid one arm across the poor fellow's shoulder and spoke to him earnestly in a low tone. In a moment or two they were kneeling side by side, and one was pouring out his heart to God for his wayward brother, and Jack, himself, was sober enough to sob like a child and to call on God for mercy.

That was the beginning of a new life. He went into church that night pitifully drunk, but he came out sober, and with a strength and a will beyond his own he persevered until there was sunshine again in the little home, and Annie and the children had a husband and a father worthy of the name.

'Jack Wentworth is surely converted,' everybody said. And how he did work! He got hold of his old companions as no one else could, and won them away from drink to soberness. You rarely heard him speak of his conversion—he was too modest for that; but he knew in his heart that there had been worked a miracle on his behalf by that same Jesus that met Saul in his journey towards Damascus.

A few months after his conversion the 'no-license' vote of the previous December went into effect, and for once in Lynn the law was pretty well enforced. There were no really open saloons, and so no flaring temptations. Under the circumstances, Jack found it easier to resist his old appetite which, even now, occasionally asserted itself. But the city liked so well no open saloons that she voted 'no' for two more years. In an evil day, however, the city elected a mayor about whose temperance convictions very little was known, and under his administration and that of his appointee, the city marshal, rum was sold freely and almost openly. This disgusted the voters, and the old, foolish,

wicked cry, 'If it's going to be sold any way, let's have the license money,' was raised and carried the day.

Mrs. Wentworth had a secret dread of the coming of the first day of May, when the saloons were to be opened, but she said nothing and kept up a stout heart. But Jack never wavered. He stood by his guns like a good soldier, and so the spring slipped into summer, and summer into autumn, and love and reason were still upon the throne.

As I sat with the mother in the cosy little sitting-room that night, and saw the two lovely children, happy and well-cared for, at her knee, I realized, as never before, how much difference it made to have the father sober and industrious.

'I have almost forgotten what fear is,' she said, with a happy light in her eyes. 'I used to worry a great deal at first, and especially last May when the saloons were opened again. If men could only know how some other men are tempted by an open saloon, no amount of money would hire them to vote "yes."'

The two little heads at her knee were drowsy with sleep, and the mother put them to bed, returning presently to finish our conversation.

'Jack is the best of husbands,' she went on. 'He seems to be trying to atone for those few years of unhappiness he gave me. But I forgave him long ago. I love him too well'—she paused with a sudden start, and a look of fright swept over her face. Someone was coming up the stairs with the shuffling, uncertain blundering of a drunken man. My heart stood still as Mrs. Wentworth went to the door and opened it with feverish terror. 'My God! my God! It's my Jack! it's my Jack! O, Jack! Jack! What shall I do? My God! what shall I do?'

She sank into a chair dazed, stupefied, overcome. Jack staggered into the room. 'Well, what's the row?' he stammered, with a drunken leer. 'Can't a feller be sociable without a woman raising a rumpus? Say, what's the matter, anyhow?'

'O, Jack!' she cried, and then buried her face in her hands and sobbed with a wild and unrestrained passion that seemed almost beyond the endurance of her delicate form.

I stood like a thing of wood. What consolation could I offer? What word of pity could I speak? The mischief was done—how could I undo it?

She saw my perplexity and understood it. 'It's too late,' she said. 'Nothing can undo it. It's too late. Leave me with him, alone, please.'

I crept out, feeling myself the most powerless and insignificant thing in the world.

The next day I learned the whole story. Some fiend in human shape had induced him to just taste the quality of a little flask of French brandy. He yielded. Like a roaring and ravenous wild beast, the old appetite aroused itself and insisted on being gratified, and before ten o'clock that night Jack Wentworth was drunk as ever he had been.

Most of the next day he lay in a drunken stupor, but toward night, when nearly sobered, he roused himself and sneaked out of the back door. He was fearfully humiliated. He dared not look his sweet wife in the face; he dared not ask forgiveness, though he knew it might be had for