

"Very good, then, I'll try and put up with you. Take the bill down."

Tommy thanked Mr. Prindle (such was the grocer's name) most warmly, and speedily did as he was bid. Then Mr. Prindle called him, and delivered the following oration, as was his custom when he engaged a new boy:—

"Now, my young friend, just listen to me, and be very careful not to forget what you hear. Your wages will be two-and-six a week, dinner and tea provided. Your duty, in the first place, will be to do what you're told, and never be impudent when you have to do something you don't like. Your duty, in the second place, is to keep the shop clean always without being told, and mind you never have to be told that the place is dirty and untidy. Your duty, in the third place, is to come here at eight o'clock every morning, and go home at nine every evening (Sundays excepted; but on Saturday you must stay till eleven o'clock. Do your duties cheerfully and willingly, and I'll be your friend. Be slovenly and impudent, and I'll be your enemy—you understand; then tidy up the premises." Tommy set to work with right good will, and speedily accomplished his task, which was done to his master's satisfaction, and he was then packed off with a basket full of goods to deliver at customers' houses.

He went home to his mother that evening in very joyful spirits, and his brightness cheered up the poor widow very considerably. Hers had been a sad lot, and may be summed up in few words:—Drinking husband, blighted, impoverished home, ruined prospects, early widowhood, deep distress, and poverty. She had one boy, Tommy, and he was "the one link that bound her to earth," and made life to her still worth living. Brought up to see the ill effects and ruining capabilities of the drink, he had early shunned it, and learned to detest its very name; and it pleased his mother mightily to see him building on the solid rock of total abstinence, instead of on the shifting sands of so-called moderation.

Tommy resumed his duties the next morning with a light heart, and all the forenoon he worked cheerfully, tidied here and there, put this and that straight, and kept himself busy. It seems to me that this keeping yourselves busy is one of the great secrets of success in life. Boys, see to it, that you never let yourselves be idle. If you seem not to have anything to do just look round and something will suggest itself, and if it does, do it—don't shirk it and think there's no need to do it yet awhile.

Dinner time came, and Tommy was quite ready to do justice to the dinner. It was brought out to him in the shop, and as soon as it was deposited at the end of the counter he went to it. What was his surprise when he saw standing by the side of his plate a glass of ale! He turned very red, and by his manner seemed about to catch up the glass and sling it into the street. But his sense of respect of his master overruled this outburst, and quietly pushing the glass behind some packages so that it was quite out of sight, he ate up his dinner and resumed his occupation. By-and-bye Mr. Prindle, having finished his meal, came out of his shop parlour, and went behind the counter. Almost the first thing his eye lighted on was Tommy's untouched glass of ale, and he looked rather astonished to see it there.

"Boy!" he called out sharply.

"Yes, sir," answered Tommy, running to his master smartly.

"Why haven't you drunk your ale, eh? I sent it to you as a mark of favor because you've behaved yourself so well."

"Thank you, sir," answered Tommy, "but I never drink ale, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm a teetotaler, sir."

"Oh! you're a teetotaler, are you?" said Mr. Prindle sarcastically; "and when did you sign the pledge, may I ask?"

"Last month, sir, at the Falcon-street Band of Hope."

"Very well, my lad, now just look here. I never deal in teetotal boys," said Mr. Prindle; "they're always too clever for me, and know a great deal too much. If you want to keep the place drink that glass of ale; if you want to lose it, play the fool and refuse. I'll give you five minutes to make up your mind."

It was a knotty point for Tommy to settle. He did not there and then refuse to drink it. He had his way to make in the world, and he had made a good beginning. His mother was glad he had got a good situation, and she had urged him to do "all he could" to keep it. Would it be doing all he could to keep it if he refused to drink that glass of beer? He hardly thought it would! He argued with himself in this way (assisted a little by the tempter) for full

three minutes out of the five, and then conscience seemed at last to be able to get a word in edgeways, and it whispered softly, "Tommy, you have signed the pledge! Be brave and stand your ground!" He gave in to conscience almost immediately, and then he remembered that his mother had urged him on all occasions to stand his ground and trust in Providence. Before the five minutes had expired, he stood before his master, and without flinching he said to him—

"If you please, sir, I've thought it over, and I can't drink it."

Mr. Prindle's brow darkened and he said, testily, "Very good then, you leave at the end of the week. That will do, get on with your work."

All that afternoon Tommy's heart was sad and sorrowful, yet there was a proud consciousness of duty done, which prevented him from giving way wholly to despondency. He was but a boy, and he naturally felt losing his place almost as soon as he had got it, very deeply, and in the slack part of the afternoon he did creep into a corner of the shop and had a little cry to himself. It relieved his feelings, and he really did feel all the better for it. He was wiping his eyes with the cuff of his jacket when he came away from his corner, and he did not see the little figure that was watching him very intently; and it was not till a thin, girlish voice asked, "Boy, why do you cry?" that he opened his red eyes, and saw his master's little daughter, who had come out to talk with him, as she had talked with the other boys when Mr. Prindle was not in the shop.

She was an old-fashioned little maiden of six years old; not a beautiful child by any means—her eyes were too small, and her nose and mouth too large for that, but she had a way with her that was irresistibly attractive, and Mr. Prindle doted on her. She was an only child, and young as she was she had great influence over him.

"Boy," she asked again, "why do you cry?"

Tommy smiled, and said he supposed it was because he couldn't help it.

"I expect you've been naughty, haven't you?" asked the little one naively.

"Well, miss, I don't know whether I have or haven't. I did what I thought was right."

"Did you? And what makes you cry then? You ought not to fret if you did right."

"I can't help fretting, miss; it seems very hard that directly I'd got this place I should have to leave it again. Mother was so glad I'd found it, and now I shall have to tell her that I've lost it again. She'll be so upset about it, for we're very very poor, miss."

"Poor boy!" said the little girl sympathisingly; "tell me what you did, will you, and if it's nothing very bad I'll tell father not to send you away?"

Tommy very nearly laughed at the remark, and the positive tone in which little Florence said it; so just to satisfy her curiosity he told the story of the glass of ale and a few of the reasons why he had refused to drink it.

When she had heard him to the end she came close to him, and said, "Shake hands with me, boy: I'm a teetotaler too, although I haven't signed the pledge yet. I like you very much; you're very brave and good, and I like you better than the good boys in the story-books, because you're real. My name's Flo, what is yours?" Tommy told her.

"Tommy's a nice name," she continued. "And now I must go in. Don't cry any more, because you shan't go away. Good-bye, Tommy." And little Flo tripped merrily into the shop parlor, and left our hero standing gazing after her, wondering very much whether her words would come true.

Mr. Prindle returned a quarter past four o'clock and found Tommy quietly dusting all the shelves and canisters in the shop. He said nothing to him, but after looking round once or twice, went straight into the parlor to get his tea.

Tommy outside felt very anxious, and wondered whether the family group round the tea-table were discussing his case; he felt his ears were burning and he thought probably they were. And he was right. Little Florence had opened fire upon her father directly he came in, and by degrees she persuaded him to let Tommy speak up for himself and explain why he became a teetotaler. Mr. Prindle had taken a liking to the new boy, there was no doubt about that, and when the child of his heart pleaded for him it was no very hard matter for the grocer to accede to her wishes.