

# LITTLE FOLKS

## The Broken Pledge.

(By Florence Moore, in 'Illustrated Temperance Monthly'.)

### CHAPTER I.

Little Nan's father was a drunkard. He had not always been so. Nan could remember, when he was pleasant and bright, how she would climb on his knee while he said, 'What am I to bring you from market next time I go?' And Nan would reply, 'A white rabbit, please, father.'

And father had been more than true to his promise, bringing back the loveliest pair of bunnies that could be seen.

Then Nan would be up early, filling her basket with dandelion for her pets, coming in to breakfast with roses on her cheeks.

After her basin of bread and milk had been despatched, mother would start her for school, and father would wave his hand from Dobbin, as he rode away to the crops.

All was changed now—mother never sang over her dairy work, and sometimes on market day, Nan had seen tears in her eyes.

Nan guessed why mother cried then. Father was often very late home; she had been woken up more than once by his step, and hearing him use loud strange words downstairs.

Other days, too, he was cross and surly, and the laborers grew idle, and the farm looked neglected.

One memorable day, Mr. Slater entered the house shouting, horse-whip in hand. Nan was fondling a kitten on the hearth, which her mother had given her leave to keep.

'What brute are you wasting good food on there?' exclaimed Mr. Slater, angrily.

'A little kitten, father, that has got no home,' said Nan, timidly.

'Throw it out of doors, or stay—I'll fling it in the brook.'

'Oh, father—don't,' screamed Nan.

But Mr. Slater was raging drunk, and the sight of his innocent child irritated him. Conscience was not quite dead; he knew his slavery to drink was ruining the farm. Only that week he had signed a paper to raise money—which if not paid back soon, would mean beggary.

He had drunk heavily to drown thought, and the liquor had flown to his brain.

'Give me the kitten this minute,' he roared, cracking his whip.

The noise frightened Nan, causing her to let fall her pinafore, and the kitten to make good its escape. But Mr. Slater raised his whip to strike the tiny creature, and knowing the blow meant death, Nan ran forward to protect it.

Alas! the cruel lash descended on her tiny wrist, and the blood flowed in a crimson stream. Mrs. Slater, busy in the dairy, came running fast, as she heard Nan's moans.

'What have you done, Robert?' she inquired, sternly, as she laid Nan on the sofa.

'It was accidental—I declare,' he



said, shamefacedly. 'I wouldn't have hurt a hair of her head.'

'Fetch water, quick; I've stopped the bleeding, but she's faint.'

But Mr. Slater had relapsed into semi-intoxication, so the mother had to run herself for the cold spring water, which soon revived little Nan.

The mother took the little hand, and a few hot tears dropped on the cruel wound.

'Don't cry, mother,' whispered Nan; 'it doesn't hurt now.'

'Oh, this drink!' sobbed Mrs. Slater. 'Nan! this drink is breaking my heart.'

'Poor mother,' said Nan, tenderly, 'it is bad for you. How I wish father would give it up!'

'I wish he would, but the drink has got such a hold now. It all began when he went in for rearing horses; the farmers stand treat so over bargains. It's a dreadful custom that standing treat, and the farm, it's going to ruin. I oughtn't to talk like this, Nan, but my heart is full to-night. And father is so kind at bottom.'

'Don't fret, mother, things may be better soon,' said little Nan, softly.

### CHAPTER II.

For some time after Nan's accident, Mr. Slater kept sober. He was shocked at having caused his little daughter suffering.

But by degrees, as winter drew on, and wet days prevented outdoor work, the old craving returned, and he drank hard, though he was never hard now to little Nan.

His wife grew paler and thinner, and had it not been for Nan, would have lost heart altogether.

One day Nan came running in from school, saying:—

'Mother, may I join the Band of Hope?'

'Whatever's that?' inquired Mrs. Slater. Leading a quiet life, she knew little of the good agencies existing in the world.

'It's so nice, mother. It's a society for boys and girls—they sign the pledge not to take any drink. Mr. Pratt says if we sign now, we shall never care for the drink when we grow up. Once a month we are to have an entertainment for fathers and mothers and friends, and songs and recitations. Mr. Pratt wants me to say "Mary had a little lamb." Do let me join, mother.'

'What's that about "Mary and her little lamb"?' said Mr. Slater, coming in for tea.

He was in good temper, so when Nan renewed her request, he said, 'Yes, Nancy, you may join, though I can't promise to go, but I'll take a ticket for mother.'

Nan thanked her father, but there was a little cloud on her brow. She was longing for him to accompany her.

And Mr. Slater felt half sorry he had declined, when next week he saw Nan and her mother ready to start. He thought Nan looked very pretty in her Sunday frock, with a bunch of chrysanthemums pinned in it. She was a fragile little thing, and his wife delicate.

Fancy those two being turned out into the world to beg their bread—and they might be ere long! Drink was wrecking his health, as well as emptying his pocket. He could not bear the idea, and as soon as they had gone, fetched out the whiskey bottle.

Mrs. Slater was delighted with the entertainment. 'Mary had a