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Ottawa.

# A RECENT EXPERIENCE: A PLEA FOR PROHIBITION.

BY REV. G. L. POWELL, B.A.

"WILL you please come and see my husband as soon as you can, Mr. Powell?" said a woman, while I was shaking hands with the people as they were passing out of our church on a recent Sunday evening.

"Certainly I will," I replied. "I shall call in some time this week. What is wrong with your husband, madam?"

"He is quite indisposed, and is feeling very despondent. I shall be delighted if you will come and cheer him up a bit."

Accordingly, the writer called on Alfred Pratt on the following Friday, and found him in much the same condition as his wife had represented. He was suffering from a "bad attack of rheumatism," as he termed it; and not having been able to work for the last six weeks, was indeed much depressed in spirit and exceedingly downhearted. He was alone when I called, his wife having gone out washing.

"So you are feeling somewhat 'blue' these days, Alfred?"

"Yes, indeed, I am," he replied, "and I am pleased to see somebody to speak a word of cheer to a fellow."

"Had I known of your illness I should have called before," I replied. "Why didn't you send me word that you were sick? It seems sometimes that when people get sick they imagine their pastor must intuitively know all about it, and then if he shouldn't happen to find out, they do considerable talking along the line of pastoral neglect. Isn't that so, Alfred?"

"I am afraid that is the truth, sir. Sometimes we church-going people get quite unreasonable in our demands, and are hard to please."

"Not at all of you," I said. "There are a great many exceptions."

"Yes, yes," he answered, "that is so—there are a great many exceptions. We are not all fault-finders and grumblers. On the whole we believe that our ministers are doing all they can for us."

"That is right. I am glad to hear you speak that way of God's ministering servants. I always 'fight shy' of those people who are incessantly finding fault with the preachers. Their company is neither helpful nor desirable. Well, my brother, how have you been getting on in the divine life during those weeks of sickness? Have you been brought any nearer to God? Of course, you don't come to our church very often; but I gathered from a conversation we had some months ago, that you were a Christian man and a member of some church—Little Trinity Episcopal Church, is it not?"

"No, sir, I am not a member of Little Trinity Church. I belong to the Fred Victor Mission. That is really my church home, but I go to your church occasionally. I like to go there because

your people are so nice and friendly. I always get a few hearty handshakes and an invitation to come again. We poor people like that kind of treatment when we go to church."

"I am sure I am delighted to hear you speak so kindly of my church, and I assure you, that you and every one else will always find a welcome there. But you haven't told me how you have been doing spiritually during your illness."

"Ah, sir! I have been greatly tempted since I have been sick," he answered sadly. "My old enemy has been at me again and has been attacking me at my weakest point."

"That is an experience common to us all, Alfred," I replied. "The tempter is sure to assail us where our fortification is most vulnerable. In what way have you been tempted so severely, my brother? If you tell me, perhaps, I may be able to render you a little assistance."

He smiled sadly. "I see you are not acquainted with me," he said. "I am a reformed drunkard. My weakest point is my appetite for strong drink. Oh, what a consuming fire it is in my bones at times! During those weeks of pain and suffering, I have had an insatiable longing for drink. It has seemed sometimes as if all the fiends of the bottomless pit were both inside and outside of me, urging me on to drink. Would you like to hear my experience from the beginning, Mr. Powell? After I am through, I don't think you will blame me entirely for the many failures I have made."

I replied that I should like to hear his experience, which I give as briefly as possible:

"I was born in London, England, and am now in my fifty-fourth year. I was one of six children—two boys and four girls. Father died when I was about ten years old, and left mother with us on her hands. My brother was my senior by some two years, and he did all he could to help mother support and provide for us. I said my father died; I should have said he was killed, for his death was caused by drink."

"I shall never forget the day he died. That death-bed scene is as vividly before my mind now as if it happened but yesterday. We lived in one room, not larger than this one where we are sitting. The furniture consisted of an old table, two rickety chairs, an old wooden bedstead, and a few cooking utensils. My father was lying on some straw on the bed, and with but scanty covering. All of us children slept huddled together on the floor in one corner of the room. The morning father died mother called us early. He was raving mad with delirium tremens, and we stood over him and watched him for two or three hours. It seemed as if the room was full of devils. At last the end came; his ravings ceased, all became quiet, the hush of death fell upon us, and father was no more. My brother and I made a promise then to our dear mother over the corpse of our father that we would never touch intoxicating drink. My brother kept his promise, but I broke mine. The same day on which father died he was buried. None of us went to the funeral. He was buried in a pauper's grave, and neither

mother nor one of his children has ever seen his grave unto this day."

"At the age of fourteen I joined a temperance society in the East End of London, called the 'Cold Water Guards.' Do you see that picture on the wall? That's me in the uniform of the society. I tell you, sir, that association was a great help and a great blessing to me. But for that society, I might have fallen sooner. One member of the Association took an interest in me, and I became apprenticed to a painter and decorator, and two or three years after serving my time at that business, I went into the chimney-sweeping trade. That is a very profitable business in London. Do you see that other picture there? That's me again. There I am dressed as a chimney sweeper, and there are the tools of my trade in my hands—brooms, you know. Now, look at that third picture. You see I am dressed like a gentleman. You'd never know I was a chimney-sweeper then, would you? I was very successful there, having had four branch chimney-sweeping businesses, where I bought and sold the soot, and also rags, bottles and bones."

"When I was twenty-six years of age, I was in a position to marry, and like a great many other young men, I took to myself a wife. She was a Londoner like myself; but do you know that step was the cause of the bitter experiences of seven years of drunkenness. We lived happily together for fourteen years. She had quite a bit of learning, and attended to my book-keeping and correspondence and kept our bank-book as well. You look surprised at that! Why, one time I could write a cheque for seven hundred pounds—about \$8,500 of Canadian money, I suppose."

"One morning I was called to one of my branch businesses early, to look after an offer that had been made to my agent, and on going out my wife asked me what time would I be home. I told her that I could not tell exactly but that, in all probability, it would be late in the evening before I returned. That was the last time I saw her from that day till this. As soon as I had gone, she and one of my hired men—a chimney-sweeper and twelve years her junior—ran away from London together, but not before they had taken from the bank all the money that I had saved, namely, seven hundred pounds. I waited for nearly a week expecting her home, but she never came, and when I called at the bank and discovered that she had taken all the money with her, I became almost frantic. Within a month, I received a letter from the mother of the man with whom she had eloped, saying that her son and my wife had gone to America, and commiserating me on the dreadful calamity that had so suddenly befallen me."

"After receiving this intelligence, I sold out my business and took to drink. You see, that was easy for me to do, for I have been cursed with the appetite from my birth. Yes, I took to drink as readily as a bird flies or a fish swims. I drank steadily for seven years, and having spent every cent of the proceeds of my business, I was reduced to a state of beggary. Many a night in London I have slept in some old alley on the door-