

Armed with her precious document, she returned home, and when next she saw her own medical man, she showed it to him.

He took it up, read it, and looked at the signature :

"Ha! Sir Andrew Clarke! H'm, yes, he is a great man, and can say these things. We country doctors can't afford it." — *Watchword.*

"FATHER, TRY!"

The great bell in the mill had just clanged the hour of six, and Rufus White, who, for the first time in two weeks, had been at work a whole day, now threw aside his apron and started for home. "Home," did I say? Ah! it was a poor apology for that blessed place, a mean little room whose only furniture was that which sheer necessity demanded.

There was no signs of a joyous welcome as Rufus drew near, for he and an only son, a gentle boy of nine years, were all that drink, poverty, sickness and sorrow had left of a once large family.

Five years before, his wife, a quiet, timid woman, worn out in the long conflict with the drink fiend, had in utter brokenheartedness, lain down to die. Rufus, sobered by the awful fact, had striven desperately with his besetment, and sitting beside her in shame and remorse, had listened to her earnest pleadings and vows, that, alas! had long since been snapped like reeds.

Just as the thick mists of the "valley of the shadow" were stealing over her sad eyes, she threw one arm around her sleeping boy, and clasping her other hand around that of her husband, whispered: "O Rufus, be good to darling Willie!" And then "the golden bowl was broken, the spirit returned to God who gave it."

For a long time her dying words lingered in his ears, but he gradually returned to his idle, drinking ways. His child had lived with a relative until her death sent the little waif back to his careless father and the shadows of the old home.

Ah! these last two years! What an age of fear, hunger, and neglect had they been to Willie!

Rufus could always find employment but would not work over a week ere he would be off on a long period of dissipation; and his sad, lonely boy used at first to entreat his father, with all the hopefulness of childhood, to do better, and in the old, first days, the fond arms of his child really held him in check. He did try in a weak way, but he soon grew harsh, sullen, or angry, so the little one ceased pleading, and went wearily on.

He, it was, who did the simple home duties, and made the most of a little, uncomplainingly: but he was a shrinking, sensitive child. He had come to them after a long period of unusual bitterness and sorrow. Thus it was his birthright. He never ran out to play among the boys, but sat alone, or fondled a poor little dog, that learned with him to crouch and hide away when he heard the uncertain step of Rufus.

But to return to Rufus and our story. As he came up the path this sunny afternoon, he heard no sound within doors, and wondered half angry, for Willie was usually preparing supper at this hour. The silence startled him, and he threw open the door, when lo! the little dog sprang up with an almost human cry, and then ran back towards the stove.

Rufus rushed after him, and there, to his horror, he saw his boy, his only child, lying prostrate upon the hard floor, uttering groans of agony. All the latent fatherhood in his nature sprang to the rescue. In wild haste he lifted the lad in his arms, and bore him to the bed.

O, how the child screamed! He was fearfully burned. He had evidently slipped while pouring water from the kettle, and so pulled it over upon him, receiving the boiling contents upon his chest.

It was fatal, as he had lain there so long. Rufus hastily called the neighbors, who ran for medical aid; but none could be had for hours, and alas! the poor, ignorant creatures about the house could minister but feebly to his comfort.

It grew dark, and those who came had to return to their families. So Rufus sat alone with the child, in horror-stricken silence, until it was too awful to be borne, and he began to abhor and upbraid himself to his child.

He was fully sober, and he really did love his pretty, gentle boy. So now, he cried out in anguish and remorse: "Oh! Willie, Willie, your wretched father has killed you. You, my darling, my all! O, Willie! if you would only blame me, despise me, curse me, child, not lay there and moan, I could bear it. But no, no! I am a fiend, a heartless wretch, and have been these five long, wretched years. I broke your mother's heart, and she slipped away from me, to meet her helpless babes that I had starved out of the world. O! Willie, Willie! that ever I was born!"

The wretched man threw his arms across the bed and buried his face in the counterpane, and there in their helplessness they waited and watched the sombre shadows made by the tiny candle. Rufus yearning wildly for the doctor's coming, Willie growing less and less conscious of anything. After a while Rufus gave a deep groan, and the child started and then said softly:

"Father, don't feel so. It is better as it is. I'll see mother, you know."

O, how that poor, hungry little soul dwelt on that "mother!" Such a wealth of comfort her memory had been to him! Presently he said:

"Father!"

"Well, Willie?"

And Willie said in half whispers.

"You know the time—the time you—whipped me so, father?"

"Yes, dear, yes. O, spare me, child!"

"Well, father, it was the pledge you know. All the boys' fathers had been to the meetings and signed, but mine, and O, father, I felt so bad to hear them speak so of you. "Old Rufus White," they called you father, and I said to them: "He will sign for me, I know." But father you know you—you—never mind now. But I got one—a real pledge, and a ribbon; and I signed it and put it on my neck, by the blue ribbon, for I thought maybe—perhaps—"

"Great God, lad! Say it out! You thought your beast of a father would beat you if he saw it in the house. O, Willie, Willie!"

"Hush, father. If you thought that I must die, and it would please me best of all to have you do it, wouldn't you? O! will you not sign your name under mine? Please, father, please do!"

The poor child shrank at his own words, and shut his eyes, half fearing a blow. But Rufus groaned out:

"O, Willie, dear lad, don't say that—not that! You must not die! You shall not die!"

The child struggled feebly and took the ribbon, with pledge attached, from his neck, keeping it just out of his father's reach, so great was his fear. But he said:

"Yes, I signed. See! It says, 'God helping me.' And my teacher said he would help anybody—me and you, father. O, father you can leave off drink if He helps you, and you will try, won't you?"

The child put forth his hand to meet his father's, his blue eyes shining like stars, so eager was he. But alas! it was too much. With a quick gasping sigh, he clasped his other hand upon his heart, and fell back. The blue eyes looked upward but with a gasp he murmured: "Father, try!" And Rufus, bending above the boy, burst into a storm of tenderness and weeping, begging him to "forgive him, to stay with him, to wait, wait!" Ah, it was in vain. Rufus had been a strong man once, but liquor had taken his firmness with his handsome looks long ago, and now he laid his dead boy back softly, and fell upon his knees beside the bed weeping like a woman, and crying out in the half-darkness for "Willie! Willie!"

Idle cry! The gentle spirit was far beyond his voice now. The lips that had ever been swift to give reply were growing white and cold. The fair face had no life-light upon it now, but the slight hand still grasped tightly the blessed pledge.

After a while Rufus began to grow calm, and, as all of us have done, he cast his thoughts backward in the past, and conscience encouraged memory to place before him many a bitter draught.

He folded his arms in deep dejection and gazed upon his beautiful, dear child while memory brought back to him the last words of her whom he had promised to love and cherish: "Rufus, Rufus, be good to darling Willie." And conscience stern accuser, said in solemn voice: "Have you remembered? Have you been good to Willie?"

O, the bitterness of this hour! "Good to Willie." He gazed upon his child, and, with a tender touch, put back the fair hair; and there upon the young brow lay an ugly scar. It seemed to him like the eye of an avenging angel and pierced his very soul. He grew aghast, and clasping his hands, he cried out, like Cain! "Oh God! My punishment is greater than I can bear."

His eyes fell upon the little hand and its treasure, and he gently untwisted the fingers, and carried the card to the candle. How it melted him. There in broken school-boy hand, was the simple name, "Willie White," with room beneath for his own. He read it over carefully and Willie's words came to him—"Teacher said he would help anybody—me, and you, father. O, father, you can leave off drink if He helps you, and you will try, won't you father?"

There had been a time in Rufus White's life when he had known, by happy experience, that God would help him, and now he sat and thought it all over. "God helping him," he would try; but, alas! what a miserable prodigal he had been. Could he ask to be taken back? Suppose he did not ask; he could grow no better by waiting. Ah! these wretched years had fully proved the force of the dear Christ's words: "Without me ye can do nothing," Yes, God helping him he would return."

The physician and returned, and entered, but, shocked to find his assistance vain, the former returned, and his friends begged poor Rufus to leave his silent treasure with them. So, taking the little card, he went up to the loft or garret. And now began the struggle. How he wept and prayed for pardon. In self abasement he smote upon his breast, and cried like one of old: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The conflict was severe, and realizing more and more this great need, he cried out in awful earnest: "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" And there at the foot of the cross he found the gift the Holy One came to bring—repentance and forgiveness of sins. He cried for freedom, for the removal of the terrible thirst which was consuming him; and when the birds sang in the early morning shadows, he "whom Satan had bound these ten years, arose stood up free, and glorified God." He was a man once more, bless God! He knew it, and with a trembling hand he wrote his name beside that of his dead darling, and baptized them with tears.

Later he went softly down, and there he saw his little lad asleep in his