

HE COULD NOT HELP HIMSELF.

WHY do you not go over to the town hall to the Gospel temperance meeting?" asked Ned Dracut, the Riverside hotel clerk, of a dozen or more young fellows his companions and friends, who were lounging in the office.

"Do you mean it?" asked Rob Hart. "We came in here to keep you in countenance supposing that you would be put out if we went."

"Not I, but I shall be angry at you and at myself too if you stay here."

"Well you are a queer one!" said Tom Waite. "Why don't you go yourself?"

"What is the use?" replied the clerk savagely. "I am not of age and I am obliged to stay here and sell the accursed stuff. I am where I cannot help myself, but I wish you would all go to the meeting and sign the pledge and never step into this or any other rumhole as long as you live!" and the youth's voice grew husky.

"All right! Come on boys!" and as the heavy door swung together behind them, the young clerk buried his handsome face in his hands and rested his elbows upon his knees.

Presently there was a click of the lock of the door, opening behind the bar, and his father, Col. Dracut looked in.

"All alone lad?" he queried cheerfully.

"Every one is at the town hall, let us lock up and go over."

"Public sentiment is such just now that I fear they would hoot at us father. I should not mind for myself but I should for you."

"Oh, there is nothing of that sort in the spirit of the work. They are Gospel meetings. Come on."

People undoubtedly were surprised to see them enter the crowded hall during the singing of the first hymn, and more surprised still to see the Colonel push his way to the front, ascend the platform, and speak a few words to the presiding officer.

"He intends to break up the meetings."

"He is here to make trouble," whispered the timid ones, but as the music ceased the Colonel, tall, portly, fine looking, and genial came to the front of the platform and said,

"My friends I simply wish to announce that the roof of the Riverside Hotel has fallen in, the bar is closed, there is one less gate to hell open in this town from this time!"

Then what a cheer went up. Women sobbed, the cheeks of many of the men were wet with tears of which they were not ashamed, and for there was not a vacant seat in the hall. Ned Dracut sank down on the knee of Tom Waite who was sitting by his sister, for, he said later, "I was so all of a tremble with surprise and joy that I could not stand."

When the applause had subsided, the Colonel went on:

"An hour ago I awoke from a nap in my little den of a private office to hear my boy Ned, the pride and prop of my old age and the joy of my heart, urging some of his young friends, nice boys, of good families, who have been taking lessons in drunkard making in my bar room, to come over here and sign the pledge. When he was rallied a little upon his new departure and asked why he did not practice as well as preach, he replied that he was obliged to sell the accursed stuff and was where he could not help himself. My friends those words stung me to the heart. I have been proud of calling myself a thoroughly honorable man. I have said that because I was a rumrunner I was not hard-hearted. That I was kind to the poor, and kept within the letter of the law in all ways. I have maintained, too, that a landlord must be able to provide drink if the public demanded it, as well as food and shelter, and that if there were two houses side by side, to choose from, one a plain, neat, house, like the temperance hotel, and the other a stylish, luxurious rumhole, the landlord of the temperance house would be left to starve; and that I sold liquor in order to be able to keep up a house acceptable to the general public. My son's words helped me to see that for these many years my prosperous business has been putting people where they could not help themselves.

"The man with an appetite who could not get by my door without coming in for a glass of whiskey could not help himself. The wives who have submitted to ill treatment from drunken husbands could not help themselves, the children who have gone cold and ragged and hungry while their father spent his hard-earned money at my bar, could not help themselves, and lastly, my only son cries out in a voice of despair that he is in my grip and cannot help himself. No one shall ever say that of me again, for, God helping me, I will hereafter keep a temperance house: I will lead a temperate life; my influence shall be on the side of temperance, and that means on the gospel side, and, as far as in me lies, I will undo the wrong I have done by the sale of alcohol."

A perfect wave of enthusiasm swept through the hall that placed the name of nearly everyone present upon the pledge before the meeting broke up.

"What did I tell you?" said Tom Waites' dainty sister, as she put the pen into Ned Dracut's hand for him to sign his name to the long roll of honor. "You see now what you have done, but you said you had no influence. I tell you when the prayers of God's people are behind us we all have an influence."