

Misses Boyer

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Temperance Department.

THREE CHRISTMAS EVES.

(From the Temperance Mirror.)

"It's got too late for Ted to go to school this afternoon ain't it, mammy?"

The woman addressed stopped the whirl of her sewing machine for a moment, to look up at the clock.

"Yes, he won't have had his dinner in time. I can't think what he is staying out so late for—he is generally so quick in going an errand."

The whirring began again, but the little girl was not satisfied.

"Mammy," she said, going to her side, "may I go down and meet Teddy?"

Again was the work suspended, and the patient mother looked down sadly on her little one.

"No, Aggie darling—don't you know that it is very damp to-day? And you wouldn't like to get a bad cold for Christmas would you?"

"But I haven't been out for ever so many days! Shall I get some new boots for Christmas, mammy?"

"We shall see, dear."

Unsatisfactory reply, and poor little Aggie went back to the window rather gloomily. Her face grew brighter, however, as a step bounded up the long flight of stairs to their door, and a boy about twelve years of age ran in.

"Mammy!" he cried, "mammy, I've got a place!"

"Teddy!"

Eagerly the boy went on, explaining how he was to go to the grocer's shop down in the village as errand boy, dwelling on the advantages it would afford him—delighted at the opportunity of earning some money; but to his surprise his mother checked him.

"Ted, dear, I'm so sorry you've set your heart upon it."

"Mother! why, it 'ud be so nice for us all!"

"Anywhere but there, Ted. We'll try to get you a place somewhere else, but not there."

"Why not, mother?"

"Because Mr. Bayter is not a good man—I shouldn't like you to have anything to do with him."

And all Teddy's expostulation and persuasions were in vain, for his mother remained firm to her resolve. It was no light matter for the offer to be refused, for Mrs. Damin was a widow, and had herself and her two children to keep on the money she gained by plain needlework. Their home was two small rooms at the top of the comfortable house which they had once occupied wholly.

Teddy was already a fair scholar, and he was longing to be at work, but his mother could not reconcile herself to the idea of his going to the place which had been offered him. Mr. Bayter was a gay kind of man, and rather a favorite with the children, but Mrs. Damin knew that he was not of a good character. He was far too fond of the intoxicating cup, and all worldly pleasure—and not for Ted's sake would she have her son taught to emulate his example. Although not a professed abstainer, she had never allowed her children to taste intoxicating drink, for she had seen a good deal of trouble through it.

So she stood firm for more than a fortnight, but then the offer was renewed, with more advantageous terms, Christmas being a busy season, and Ted being a favorite with Mr. Bayter.

"You might let me go, mother," pleaded Ted, half-crying with his eagerness, "you know I've got to leave school at Christmas and school won't make much difference. These poor little Aggie hasn't got her shoes yet, and if you aren't able to get them, she'll have to be indoors all Christmas, O mammy, you must let me go!"

Then, for the first time, his mother began to waver. Things were going badly with her. The short days necessitated so much more expense, and less work—and Mrs. Damin began like her son, to think that it

would be wrong to despise such an offer. For, after all, it did not follow that because Mr. Bayter liked drink, her son would learn to like it too, nor that he would contract any other pernicious habit, such as smoking and swearing.

So, after a short demur, Mrs. Damin reluctantly yielded—and Ted ran off triumphant.

Christmas Eve came, and found Mrs. Damin at work as usual in her little room, where things did not look very cheerful, for the fire was small, and little Aggie was sitting close beside it, with a doleful face trying hard not to cry. Her new boots were not bought yet, for the household expenses had taken all the money, and through a violent cold, Mrs. Damin had been unable to work for more than a week.

Aggie was a brave child, and she knew it would pain her mother to see her cry, so she kept back her tears. She was sitting up for Teddy, but it got late and her head nodded drowsily, when at last his step was heard. He was in high spirits, and his cheeks and his eyes were very bright. He ran over and kissed his little sister, and then sat down to take some supper, for which he did not stay at his master's. His mother stopped her work presently, and going up to him, laid her hand fondly on his shoulder, but as he turned up his face to speak to her, she started back.

"Teddy, have you taken any intoxicating drink to-day?"

The boy's eyes dropped, but the question could not be evaded.

"Only a little, mother. We were so busy, and I was so very hot and thirsty, and Mr. Bayter said it wouldn't do for me to drink water. I only had just one little glassful—and I promise you, mother, I'll never take any again!"

The boy spoke earnestly, and his mother was fain to believe him, and to quiet her apprehensions with this assurance.

"Why, Aggie, what's the matter?" Teddy asked, as his little sister fairly broke down in something she was saying about the morrow. "Oh, is it your shoes? Don't cry about that, sissie—we won't have a dull Christmas."

"You won't, but I shall!" sobbed the child. "now it's rained again, I shan't be able to go out—not even to church."

"Oh, we'll manage it somehow," answered her brother cheerfully, "you shall go to church even if I carry you on my back."

But though Aggie couldn't help laughing at the promise of such a novel ride to church she went to bed with rather a sorrowful heart. She was awakened the next morning by her brother's voice.

"Aggie, get up—it's a glorious day!"

Aggie sprang out of bed, forgetting her troubles, and was already nearly dressed when Teddy ran in, crying out "O Aggie, hurry up, you can't think what old Santa Claus has brought for you!"

Agnes ran out into the other room at once. There hung her little stocking by the chimney place—bulging out with a few trifling articles, but oh! there was something else too,—a pair of new boots.

"You see," Ted said, as he watched her delight with no less joy—"the stocking wasn't quite big enough to hold 'em, so Mr. Santa Claus—just took the trouble to tie 'em on outside."

Agnes laughed—for she was old enough to have found out all the secrets of Santa Claus—and how she hugged and kissed her mother and brother, and what a happy day they had, in spite of their poverty, and how proud Mrs. Damin was of her boy—almost forgetting the shade of apprehension which his yesterday's "one little glass" had called up in her mind.

"Mother do go to bed, and let me sit up for Ted!" Thus pleaded Agnes Damin, now a tall girl of fifteen years, as she looked up for a moment from the fine needlework over which she bent. But the worn, weary woman who rocked herself backward and forward by the fireside, shook her head.

"No, no, my child! you go to bed. You need rest—I don't feel as though I can ever get any rest again, unless my boy is saved. O Ted! and to think it was all my own fault!"

Agnes bent lower over her work—she knew how useless any attempt would be to minister to that grief.

They were sitting in a small room in a town home, whither they had removed in order to get more work. Ted was a skopman now, or professed to be, for he had

more than once been for weeks out of employment, dependent on the earnings of his mother and sister. For Ted, the loving son and brother of childhood, the manly boy—had grown up into a wild, reckless young fellow now, and was squandering the days of his youth, and breaking his mother's heart.

"Agnes," said her mother suddenly—"do you remember it was eight years ago when Ted first went to Mr. Bayter's? Eight years ago to-night he bought you those boots. He was a good boy then—I was afraid for him, but oh! I never thought he would turn out so wild as this!"

A flood of tears burst forth, and the two went together.

Ted's downfall had been rapid. Mr. Bayter's example and influence soon told upon him; he began to love the intoxicating cup, and to think it manly to smoke and swear. And to conceal these habits from his mother and sister, he was obliged to resort to a system of petty deceit—and having once swerved from the habit of truth, it was easy to concoct his plans of deception—and, encouraged by his master, Ted fell, step by step. Not until it was too late did Mrs. Damin perceive that her fears were verified. She hastened to remove Ted—though with some difficulty, and great reluctance on his part—from the stores, but it was too late; the evil habits were acquired, and though, for a little time after their removal to the town he gave promise of being steadier, he soon fell in with gay companions, and grew worse and worse.

On this Christmas Eve they were expecting him home from his work, where he had expected to be detained till late—but as the hour of nine had passed, and he had not come, they concluded that he had gone straight away to some of his usual resorts, and Agnes was anticipating wearily the sad watch till the morning hours, which she was determined to share with her mother. Soon, however, they heard his step, and Agnes dried her tears, and rose to wait on him.

His swaggering air, and loose style of conversation told their own story, and he had taken enough intoxicants to render him irritable and unreasonable.

Agnes bore his fault findings submissively for she still dearly loved this erring brother—but alas! there was none of the tender affection and brotherly chivalry which had marked his conduct toward her eight years before.

It was dreadful to hear the oath with which he hailed some trifling mistake of hers. Then, for the first time, the girl lifted her head, and ventured a remonstrance—a moment later, his hand descended in a heavy blow, and for the first time, he had struck his sister.

What a scene for a mother's eye to rest upon—and on Christmas Eve!

Again it was Christmas Eve, and Agnes and her mother sat together in the same room. Agnes was now a slender girl of twenty, but the quietness of her manner was painful to see in one so young, and the shadow on her pale face told of anxiety and care. Her mother's face wore a look of premature age, and hopeless grief—for to them this festive night brought sad and bitter memories.

"No, I don't think he'll ever come back now," Agnes said sadly. "Oh mother, only think, it is five years ago to-night since he slept here! Oh if we only knew where he is, and what he is doing, it wouldn't be quite so hard."

So Ted had gone—and the two who loved him still worked, and waited, sorrowing for the wandering one, not daring to hope for his return. On that Christmas Eve when we last saw him—when he dealt the blow that was remembered still, though long since forgiven—he left his home; the next tidings they heard were that he had been arrested for assaulting a policeman. They hoped that this might prove a warning to him, and that on his release from prison he would be induced to give up the drink and reform his ways; but alas! though contrition did touch the young man's heart—though in those days of enforced abstinence his better nature did assert itself, and he resolved to "be a man," and fight against this foe, and regain his respectable position—it needed but a few steps from the prison-door—and the tempter appeared again. A so-called "friend" met him in the street—and shouting with joy at seeing him out again, invited him to "take a glass." Ted hesi-

tated for a moment, but there were a few taunts, and he was conquered; his resolutions were shattered, his every prospect of reform blighted—and those two watched and waited for the one who never came. Somehow, Ted couldn't bear to go home—his situation was lost, and nothing but ruin seemed before him. And then, that fatal appetite, again revived, seem to overpower him and he was again led into crime—that of theft. This time he managed to escape, and fled with an accomplice to the thickest part of the great City, where his life was dragged out in misery and drunkenness, as untold numbers are, even now.

And on this Christmas Eve, that anniversary of the day when the deadly seed was planted—that "one little glass"—his heart-broken mother, and toil-worn prematurely grave sister, almost relinquished the last hope of seeing him again.

"Oh Agnes," Mrs. Damin moaned, as she raised her tear-stained face, "I feel as though I couldn't die without seeing my boy again. Only two—and yet one, has been ruined through my want of firmness! My poor children!"

"Hush!" And Agnes's pale face flushed—there had come one feeble rap, and she moved toward the door. Some one else, however, was crossing the little hall to go out and uttered such an exclamation of surprise that it brought most of the people out of the house around him—but first were Agnes and her mother.

There across the threshold was stretched a man's form—a man haggard and emaciated with a few tattered rags hanging upon him, and a face scarred and bloated—telling its own sad story. He had fallen down unconscious, and did not heed the wild cry which rang out into the street, and startled the passers.

"Oh Ted, my son, my son!"

Yes, it was he—the wanderer. Tenderly they took him up, and carried him to the bed which had been kept awaiting him, by the toil of his dear ones, and then the sympathizing neighbors left him to the care of the loving ones—and before long their care was rewarded by seeing him returning to consciousness. He was too weak and ill to tell them the mournful story of his life—but they guessed it only too well. And drink and want had done their work, and it was not for many weeks that they had to toil for their lost and found one. There was a short time of bitter mourning and deep suffering, hopeless repentance for a wasted life—and then that life was ended.

Twenty-five short years, blasted and rendered worse than useless by the direful foe—and one more death was added to the thousands killed by drink—two more mourners were left to bewail the fate of their dear one, and to curse the demon who was his death.

"THE WORST SIN."

Says Father Burke, of the Roman Catholic Church:

"When God made us He gave us soul and body together, in all the activity of their powers. The man that annihilates his own soul for a single instant by drunkenness commits an outrage against the God that has made him, against the Author of his nature."

THERE IS A STORY told of a lively old lady whose intemperate husband had numberless times promised reform. He fell, as she had predicted, into an open well, one dark night, and screaming lustily for help, at last delightedly saw rescue in the glimmer of his lady's cap-trill over the windlass. She demanded, and he hastened to give, a new promise of reform, whereupon she let down a bucket and drew him his length out of the water, who, unfortunately, the handle slipped from her grasp, and he was replunged into the water. At a second attempt she lifted him higher, but the handle again slipped. A third time, when he was still higher, it slipped. The abject victim cried out desperately. "Now, old lady, you're doin' that on purpose," to which she frankly and ingeniously replied, "Well, now, old man, I am. 'Twouldn't do for ye to come out sudden, but by degrees, ye know." This said that, recognizing his own phrases, and deploring the same, out of the depths the water-soaked man voluntarily made a promise which he kept after being drawn out.

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