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MONTHLY VISITOR

OF THE



No. 8.

NOVEMBER.

1847.

THE LADY'S PLEDGE.

BY REV. T. I. WHITE.

To see a wild and arid waste cultured and made fruitful, is very delightful; to see order taking the place of confusion; cannot fail to gratify; to see beauty where once prevailed deformity, both cheers and pleases. But to see all this take place, in a moral point of view, attunes the heart to holy joy, and gives a spring to accents of lofty praise; and may well induce the exclamation of reverential surprise, "What hath God wrought!"

Miles Conrad's father was a moral waste—a pestilence that wasted at noon day—destroying mental beauty, and supplanting it by deformity and confusion, for he not only yielded himself up to all the besotting influences of drunken and dissipated habits, but was anxious that the young should be his companions; and by his taunt and jeer he would banter them into a *taste* and a *love* for the specious poison, and so draw them away from rectitude and sober uprightness. A good workman, with plenty of work, he was rarely short of the means which facilitated his base purpose; and, crafty and untiring he would rarely miss "*making a man*," (as his phrase was,) of some artless young fellow—hence the danger of being where there are such aids to vitiate taste, and overthrow just intentions. Miles' son was his apprentice, and unnatural as it may appear, yet Tom was the chosen "*butt*" of jest and ridicule. Tom would not drink, and though reproached and persuaded by turns, yet for years Tom only mourned his father's folly. Lost time—money unnecessarily spent—brawls and jokes that cost much to settle—always disgusted Tom. However, as water constantly dropping wears away stone, so the oft-repeated assurance that nobody would employ him, and nobody give him instruction or additional insight into his business, if he continued the unsocial and tame creature he then was, affected Tom. "Look at me," the father would say, "and see, every body respects me, and I can always get a job, and any one, for a pint, will give me instruction. Now mind, Tom, what I say, you need not get *drunk and make a beast of yourself*; but unless you drink a *little*, you will neither have strength nor spirit for anything." And so at last Tom entered upon the world, and in the

true spirit of his father's instruction, became the companion of like wicked men; his trade had been easily acquired, but this new habit, this that was to be of such use to him in commending him to the favour and approval of all, was most difficult to learn; a natural distaste for liquor, and an inward and long-nursed feeling of disgust had to be subdued, ere he could enter upon the wild career which prospectively lay before him. But persevering application soon broke down the preservatives of nature, and Tom trode faithfully in his father's steps, aimed at the same eminence, and very soon surpassed him. Miles heretofore had had all the quarrel to himself, the irritating effects of strong drink had not passed into the system of the son. But now both were alike contentious; and brawls and open quarrels made them ready to fight; however, saved from this by the interference of friends, it was not uncommon for each to part with the other threatening dangerous things. Separated for a time, Tom became the enamoured and loving young man, and he wooed a girl of industry and promise. He was wise enough to conceal his habit, and keep from her knowledge his newly acquired taste; and at last the time of unity came, and new responsibilities were imposed upon him; restraint for a time kept him up to his duty, and labour and toil met with their reward. But Miles was getting old, and his son being a good workman, why should not the father leave his interest in trade to him? Often it was their lot to work together, as of old—and as Tom had learned to take his “*whack*” like a man, there was no demur or dispute about the matter, but settling time would come, and that was the time for quarrel; one had not ordered the drink, and the other had not drank of it, and yet the score was to be paid for between them; oaths and curses deep and bitter would now be vented one against the other, and though they never came to blows, yet imprecations and horrid threats were held out against each other. Tom's wife began to find out that she had not a sober husband; reckless of all regard, he became the sot and decoy for the publicans; many were the new companions he introduced, and many the pounds he spent to prove what a *good fellow* he was. Tom was quite an adept at singing and “*chaffing*,” few equalled him; for if a stranger came to any of his favourite houses, it was no uncommon thing when all there were beat by the stranger, to call in Tom, who, by banter or open falsehood, would be sure to triumph, to the no small gratification of his party, who, together with the landlord, rarely failed to *treat* him for his services. Tom excelled and surpassed his companions, and though often implored by his amiable wife to give up his evil course, yet, infatuated, he would return like the dog to his vomit; his robust frame was giving way—his house, but for his wife's industry, would have been wretched, his children neglected, and his own prospects blasted—he seemed to think there was no hope for him—and irresolute and changeful, his promises and hopes were all alike failing. Tom's wife always commended herself to the notice and approval of the benevolent, who, struck with her industry, cleanliness, and care, frequently visited and talked with her about the well-being of her soul, and the education of the children; and on these occasions it was that Tom's habits and wilful dissipation were apparent, for one lady, more assiduous than the rest, would be often in the house when Tom would come home mad, boisterous, and drunkenly brave, and gently would she chide him and counsel him, but this only chafed his spirit, and off

he would go again, and more mad and wilful he would revel on, not knowing where he went or what he did, often perilling life by walking into ponds, sleeping in the open air, and falling in the high road. Strange that the Governor of human life, and to whom all are amenable, should so long permit, with so much forbearance, the violation of his laws both physical and moral. "But his mercy endureth for ever."

"Thomas," said this lady, "why are you afraid to meet me, have I wronged you?" "No—but—" "But what?" "Why, you trouble me, I can't become sober, it is impossible—I have tried your *moderation* plan, and drink a little, but when it is before me, I feel such a strange infatuation, that I must drink on." "Well, why don't you become a teetotaller; thousands have been cured and why not you?" "A teetotaller! why I should be laughed at?" "Well, had they not better laugh at 'sober Tom,' than 'drunken Tom?'" asked the lady. "Why, as for that, I don't know; what a weakness it is to sign a pledge—a man in all other things, but a child in this—but, ma'am, have you signed the pledge?" "Why, no, Thomas, I have not." "Then, why do you ask me?" and he turned abruptly and went away. Such a question, and at such a time, forced itself upon the conscience of the lady, and, troubled and concerned, she went away to ponder the searching and unanswerable question of Thomas Conrad, the drunken father of sweet and well informed children. What! said she in her closet, am I not in a condition to reprove this wicked man, and to teach him a more excellent way? I never get drunk, nay, very rarely taste the drunkard's drink, what need have I to sign the pledge? Beside, how can I become one of a community which is professedly to reclaim drunkards! and she read her sacred book, and asked for wisdom from on high, and she rose from her knees, and the thought that the drunkard must once have been sober, and by little drops, often taken, his taste became stronger and stronger, and as all sin is progressive, *this very little* with me may increase to more, and beside, this total abstinence society is for the *prevention* as well as the cure of drunkenness. So that it is as safe for me to sign for prevention, as Thomas Conrad to sign for a cure—and away she went to the Secretary, and nobly put her name on the registry, and took out her card, and then requiring a blank one, she started for Tom's house. He was at home. For many days he had been absent, debt had overwhelmed him; poverty, with her rude hand, had dressed him in rags, and, depressed and woe-worn, he was literally on the point of desperation, revolving in his mind as to what his steps should be. He had dressed himself and was coming down stairs, when a stranger's voice was heard. He paused, but it was no use; untiring fidelity in the office of benevolence must be rewarded, and though determined to go up again, yet the lady's voice prevented him. "Thomas," she said, "I have signed the pledge, and have brought a blank pledge card for you." "Well you may leave it," was his cold reply; he left the lady and his wife together—he could eat nothing, but felt thirsty in the extreme—he went to his work—his boy went with him—his father was on the same job—and as the day rolled on, he sent the lad for *half a pint*; the lad went and returned, but the landlord, with whom he had spent pounds, would not now trust him a penny. "Where's the beer?" asked the father. "They won't trust you," replied the lad. "Won't trust me?" and he paused,

and was silent. In a moment the lady's pledge was thought of. "Bring me some cold water," he said, "and when I ask for trust again, I shall get it." The water was brought, and Tom drank—it was cold—clear—refreshing—

" His arm grow strong,
Though his toil was long,
When he drank of the cup of cold water."

Tom went home. He thought he would have *tea* that day—he was not in the habit of taking tea. His wife was surprised, but never suffered her feelings to escape. Busy and noiselessly she spread the table, blew the fire, made the refreshing and cheering cup; the little one played with the kitten, and enticingly laid it on the father's knee—talked of its pranks, and laughed in the father's face. Thomas was silent; the wife in suppressed tones hummed a tune, feeling some difficulty now and then, saying a kind word to the child—hushing his boisterous mirth, and directing some of the other children's movements. Thomas had drunk the first cup, and affected to be diverted by the sport of the little one and kitten, and, as though suddenly recollecting a some thing he had almost forgotten, he said, "Where's the lady's pledge?" The wife reached it from the mantleshelf—the second cup was poured out, and Thomas, deeply thoughtful, read and pondered the pledge, supping between whiles his tea and biting of his bread; again the cup was emptied and again replenished, and ere it was again empty, Thomas asked, "Where is the pen and ink?" The pen and ink were handed to him, and when the last drop lingered in his cup—while all was anxiety in that dear one's breast—and after sidgitting his ear with the feathery part of the pen which he held indecisively in his hand—as though by a desperate effort, he signed the lady's pledge, and tossing it rudely across the table, he said, "*there, I'm a teetotaller!*" and from that day to this the landlord's refusal and the lady's pledge are his boast.

Ladies! you drink but little, but your hands are not clean. This lady felt her weakness—felt she was inadequate to the task of recommending what she herself had never practised; but when she had signed the pledge, then with confidence, with assurance she could say, Do as I do, and not as I say. Put yourselves in this condition—sign the pledge, and you may invite the drunkard; persevere, and you shall meet with your reward.