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Contributors

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Smoke and Flame

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SMOKE AND FLAME.

A STORY OF MANCHESTER FAST LIFE.

"WHY, it's only a cigar."

"Yes ; but you should not begin at all."

"Get away, Bob. What's the harm in being like other fellows ?"

"More harm than you think of. But I see you will not take my advice."

"Certainly not. I mean to learn smoking. Why there isn't one in our department who does not smoke, and I am not going to be singular, I can tell you."

This was part of a conversation between two brothers, who stood outside of a tobacconist's shop in Manchester. They were the only sons of Mrs. Winton, a widow lady, who had left Congleton on the death of her husband. Her history was very sad, and only too common. She had married Edward Winton with high hopes. He was in a good position, and for a time all had gone well. But drink ruined him, and he was found dead on the roadside with a broken bottle near him. Left with two children she had struggled on amidst great privations, growing every year more sad and silent. For days she would move about the house saying scarcely a word. Her native place became at length unbearable, and she

resolved to try if she could recover hope in Manchester. Her sons had so far done all in their power to comfort her.

The eldest, Robert, was a steady plodding youth who never smoked, drank, or went to the theatre. The younger, Frederick, was bright and sociable, made numerous friends, and led a merry life. They had not been long in the city when they came under our notice. Both of them had hitherto been abstainers and active members of a Band of Hope. Neither had learned to smoke ; but Fred had been twitted by some of his new friends on not being able to afford a cigar, and as his pride was touched he resolved to learn smoking. He did not think how much the money was needed at home by his sorrow-stricken mother, nor that he was beginning with an indulgence he did not need and could ill afford. At his dinner hour he had gone into the nearest tobacconist's, had purchased a cigar for threepence, and was trying to smoke it when his brother met him.

Fred had his first cigar. It made him sick. He returned to his work unfit for his duties, made several mistakes, and pleaded as an excuse that he was unwell. When he and his brother Robert got home both were silent.

Robert wished to warn Fred of the danger he was running, and yet he hesitated lest he should do more harm than good. Fred was ready for a discussion ; he was at that silly age when he considered his own opinions and doings perfect. So he began :

“ You seemed shocked at my smoking a cigar this forenoon ? ”

“ I was,” answered Robert. “ And if you saw the

possible consequences clearly, you would be shocked as well."

"It's all stuff. You are always looking ahead and seeing something that no one else ever sees. I do believe you will end by becoming a sour miser for whom nobody cares."

"I think not, Fred. But let me give you an idea of how I look upon your smoking even a single cigar."

"With all my heart, Mr. Sobersides," said the witty Fred.

"Well, then, you have smoked one cigar, and it is likely you may smoke another, and yet another: that means you may become a habitual smoker."

"Quite possible."

"See what that means. You have created a new appetite, increased the number of your wants, and made it more difficult to live in comfort. Here, then, is money to be spent on what you call a luxury, and you know as well as I do that the more luxuries you have, the more do you soften and enervate both body and mind. Besides you are one of the many smokers in the kingdom. How much money do you think is spent on smoking in Britain?"

"O! I cannot say. Something considerable, no doubt."

"What would you think of £16,500,000 a year?"

Fred opened his eyes. He had no idea that such a sum was spent in smoke. It must be pretty accurate, because Robert was great in figures. And from his own knowledge of business he knew something of the value of such an enormous sum.

"But," continued Robert, "not to speak of what might

be done with such a sum, or of the many other expenses it leads to, can you tell me any fair return you get for such an outlay? The returns that I know of are the introduction of a poison into the body, the poison of *nicotine* in its most subtle forms,—a substance which thins the blood, fastens upon and arouses any latent disorder, has a tendency to produce cancer, and keeps the hard smoker in continual unhealth.”

“You are coming it heavy, Bob; but go on, I am fire-proof.”

“Its effects,” continued his brother, “are not confined to the body. All narcotics have in the long run a bad influence on the mind. I need not remind you what a result strong drink produced on our friend Simpson. You know how he became a nuisance in the whole place, and had to be turned off. Manchester is strewn with the wrecks of many a gallant human vessel. The influence of tobacco is not so bad as this, but it is in its own place very bad. You will, no doubt, say that when a man gets home from business thoroughly jaded he is made comfortable by a quiet smoke, which soothes his brain and helps him to forget his cares. But do you mean to tell me that if a man has never learned to smoke he has no means of soothing his brain? If the brain is tired give it God’s appointed rest and sleep; if you have cares that worry, then cast your cares upon God; if you need change of occupation, there are books, and music, and games; a hundred things pleasant and useful which will do much more than smoking ever can do, and leave no bad effects.”

“That may be true, Bob; but I am sure I have seen many a man who could do double work after a good smoke; it stimulates his mind.”

"Granted. But what about the practice of using stimulants? A horse which you see the driver continually lashing with his whip is being stimulated. But do you think much of the animal that requires it? Besides, does the whip add to its strength?"

"No; I grant it doesn't."

"So all stimulants mean weakness in body or mind. They, no doubt, call forth what strength we have already in store, but they never really add to our strength."

"Why, Bob, you are quite philosophical. The English Anti-Tobacco Society will soon call for your eloquence. The next thing you will be saying is, that whoever smokes will go to the dogs."

"I never make wild statements. I leave that to those who require to prop a false position. But your remark puts me in mind of what Parson Strong, an American minister, once said in an election sermon. 'It has been charged that I have said that every democrat is a horse-thief. I never did. What I did say was only that every horse-thief is a democrat.' So, to quote Horace Greely, I do not say that every smoker is a blackguard, but show me a genuine blackguard who is not a lover of tobacco, and I will agree to find you two white blackbirds. Just use your own common sense in the matter. Here is a young man beginning life. If he is wise he will say what Sir Isaac Newton said when asked to smoke: 'I will make no necessities unto myself.' But instead of that he learns to smoke as if he thought it impossible to become a true man but by becoming a walking chimney. He has learned to indulge; he associates with intelligent men who, like himself, are slaves of bad habits. At home he pollutes the rooms, and when he is travelling his fellow-

passengers are sickened. He spends more and more on his favourite weed, poisons his body, weakens his mind, and often ends in becoming an exhausted old man who turns round to his children and young friends saying: 'Never learn to smoke. I learned when I was young, but I wish I had never begun.'"

"Bravo, Bob. Go ahead. But what have you got to say to the fact that almost all our great men smoke, and that some doctors recommend smoking to prevent infection?"

"I have to say that the first statement might be hard to prove. Famous men have smoked; truly great men will seldom be the slaves of a bad habit; and many of your so-called great men are great sinners, warning us away from the rocks of indulgence. Would you say opium eating is good, because Coleridge and De Quincey were its bond slaves? There has never been an evil under the sun which your great men have not practised and defended. In this, as in so many cases, 'truth is hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed unto babes.' And as to its being a disinfectant, I can produce the very highest medical testimony to prove that those who in hospitals smoke most are the most liable to fall victims to disease. And it stands to reason. The best preventive of disease is a clean body and a vigorous nervous system. Smoking pollutes the body, weakens the nerves, and so invites rather than averts contagion."

Fred yawned, then taking out his newly-purchased meerscham and turning to Robert said,—

"You are very clever, Bob, but really I must learn to smoke. I see all our fellows smoking, and I can't bear to be made game of. So here goes." And he lit his pipe.

Robert saw it was no use to say anything more, and took up a volume of poetry. While he read, his brother smoked and went sick to bed. In a few weeks Fred was an accomplished smoker, and learned to watch with intense admiration the gradual colouring of his meerschaum. His companions never made game of him now. He was a jolly good fellow—not like that cad of a brother of his, who was as stingy as an old miser.

Robert opened an account in the bank, and saved a little money ; Fred spent his in smoke. Robert went into the company of careful, plodding, and rising men ; Fred associated with the fast young men who used to go puffing up Oxford Road, making fun of all who passed.

It was no uncommon thing for the fast young men to get dry with smoking, and what could be more natural than for them to go into a public-house to quench their thirst. Fred went in with them. Several times he drank lemonade, but as his fast young friends chaffed him about his teetotalism, he could not bear to be laughed at, and ordered a glass of brandy. That evening he came home out of temper, and smelling of drink. His brother looked up from his book as he entered, and saw what had happened. Tears stood in his eyes as he said mournfully,—

“Have you broken your pledge, Fred?”

“Yes, I have broken my pledge, but what is that to you? I suppose I can do what I like.”

“Oh, Fred, don’t speak in that way. I knew what would happen when you learnt to smoke, and took up with these fast young fellows. But surely you will sign again.”

"Not if I know it. I mean to have my freedom. If you like to be stingy and sober, be so, but leave me alone after this to look to myself."

"What will your mother say if she hears you speaking in that style? She has enough to bear already, and if you go wrong it will be her death."

"She can say what she likes. I have been long enough under petticoat government."

Robert turned pale when he heard the utter vulgarity of his brother. He could scarcely believe that he had become so bad in such a short time. He was silent, and Fred, having no one to quarrel with, went to bed.

Next morning he awoke with a headache. Robert had been up two hours, studying Euclid. He saw it was no use to speak to Fred. They took breakfast in silence.

Fred went to business, confused and surly. When reproved, he was insolent, and, losing his temper, turned upon his superiors.

There was no remark made, but when coming away he was called into the presence of the head of the firm and quietly told that unless he changed his conduct he would be at once dismissed. He was urged to imitate Robert. He came home angry with every one, cursing the very paving stones.

Robert had also been called, but he was informed that his employer was so much pleased with him that he would receive a double advance of salary.

He came home very happy, not knowing what had been said to his brother. His double advance would buy some things his dear mother needed, and enable him also to join Mudie's library, where he could get some books he wanted very much.

He had scarcely got into the house when Fred, who sat amidst a cloud of smoke, said,—

“I have a good mind not to go back to that confounded place again.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Wrong! Why the governor had the cheek to call me into his office and scold me for not being careful and civil. But I always knew he was a humbug—one of your fellows that never smokes or drinks. He told me that if I smoked less and worked more it would be better for me, as if he had any business how I spent my money. But it’s like the old screw.”

“That’s very strange, Fred. He has just given me a double advance of salary,” said Robert, quietly.

Fred coloured, then grew angry, and said,—

“That’s like him. He always favours those who are stingy, like himself; but if he thinks to make me give up smoking, he is mistaken. I shall go past his house this very evening smoking my pipe. See if I don’t.

It was no use talking to Fred. He would have his own way right or wrong. And his own way he had, for that very evening he and a party of his fast companions went out for a spree. They spent all their money in cigars and drink. Fred, as it happened, met his employer in the street, and went puffing past him, saying to himself, “I can do just as I please in my own time and with my own cash.” They spent part of the evening in a public-house, playing at cards, and laughing at the silly people who never enjoyed life. Fred was not used to so much smoking and drinking. When the publican turned **them** out, he was dizzy, and stumbled

against a working man who was passing, who turned angrily upon him, and said, —

“Now, young gent, mind what you are about.”

“Mind what *you* are about,” was Fred’s angry retort.

A swift, crashing blow was the answer, and Fred was stretched full length on the pavement. The workman walked away. Fred’s companions picked him up, and finding he was more drunk than hurt, carried him home, propped him against the door, rang the bell, and left him to fall into Robert’s arms.

Robert was very grieved. He called his mother, who came down stairs pale and sad. They wept together over poor Fred, who, all unconscious of where he was, continued in a deep stupor, partly the result of the blow and partly that of the drink. It was the darkest night in the poor mother’s life.

Next morning he was unfit for work, and his employer gave Robert to understand that his brother’s services would not be again required.

What was to be done? Fred was defiant, Robert ashamed, the poor mother was broken-hearted. When Robert asked him what he meant to do, the answer was,—

“I can mind my own business.”

“You seem to mind it in rather an expensive style,” said Robert.

“And if so, what is that to you, or to any other sneak who is made to grub among worms?”

Robert answered not a word.

The next day Fred was missing from home. Two years passed. Robert had made great progress in private study and in business. He was universally trusted, and the only comfort of his mother, till her grey hairs came

down with sorrow to the grave. She died broken-hearted for the loss of her son.

Robert heard not a word from the runaway. He enquired and prayed, but at length concluded that Fred must have left the country.

One evening he was returning from a Temperance meeting, at which he had spoken, when he stumbled over a prostrate man. He heard a groan, and stooped down to look at the fallen one. But who can judge of his horror when he beheld the pale face of his own brother! Bursting into tears, he carried him home, and laid him in his own bed. Fred was dead drunk. He was in rags, dirty, and bloated!

Robert sat beside him all night.

It was a weary task, but he persevered.

In the morning Fred opened his eyes. He started, sat up in the bed, and looked wildly at his brother.

"Where am I? Who are you? Let me off!" He was delirious. Robert called for some assistance.

Several friends came and helped.

For a whole week Fred continued in this fearful condition,—crying in agony, leaping up against the wall, seeing around him demons who were rending him in pieces, calling at one time for drink, then for his pipe, and struggling to free himself from his friends.

At the end of a week the delirium spent its force, and left him feeble and ill.

Poor Fred. He was crushed at last, and the only one who could now help him was the sober brother who had been despised.

Two years of abandonment and degradation had done their work. When brought home the only things he had

in his pocket were an old clay pipe and about a half-penny's worth of strong tobacco !

When he had fully recovered his senses he looked round and said,—

“Where is mother?”

Robert could not answer for a time.

“Where is she? Call her, I want to ask her forgiveness.”

“You have her forgiveness, Fred, but she is dead.”

“Dead !” was the despairing cry. “Dead,” he moaned again, “Dead, and I have killed her.”

He turned his face to the wall and wept in bitterness of heart. The way of transgressors is hard. “Sowing wild oats.” Yes ; but reaping wild grain. Which was the most manly, he who crushed his mother's heart, or he who was a comfort and blessing to her when all the world was dark ? Think of it you clever, fast young men who despise home and goodness. Poor Fred ! he hides himself from the world and wishes he may die and not live.

But Robert nursed him tenderly, and had ere long the joy of seeing him better. Better in mind, as well as in body ; kindness, and teetotal nursing, made Fred a new man.

One day he had been quietly watching Robert cooking some meat for him, and said,—

“You are too kind, Bob.”

“Not a bit, old fellow. I want to get you out of that bed as soon as possible.”

“I should like very much to be better, and if am, I shall lead a different life from what I have led in the past. I am ashamed of myself. But I have had a very bitter

lesson, and I shall profit by it. O, Bob, you will never know all that I have suffered since I left home. My flesh creeps when I think how low I fell."

"Never mind the past, Fred. Let us bury it out of sight."

"I wish I could, but I cannot. When I think what a fool I have been,—smoking and drinking and rioting as if there were no God. But I have been punished. For days I scarcely had any food. I have slept in barns and under bridges,—how I have escaped prison is a marvel to me. But here I am back, like the prodigal, and God helping me I shall never be the same fool again. But there is one thing I would like."

"What is that, Fred?"

"My pipe. You will find it in my pocket."

"Are you going to smoke in bed?" said Robert, growing sad again.

"I think not. But give me the pipe."

Robert reached him the pipe. When he got it, he looked at it as we do at an old friend whom we have once loved, but who has ruined us. Then he gathered up all his remaining strength and threw it against the mantle-piece, saying,—

"There goes the last pipe I shall ever handle."

Then turning to his brother he said,—

"You were right, Bob, in warning me against the first cigar. It was my first wrong step. You know the rest. I have killed my mother. I have lost three of my best years, and have all but lost my soul. I have suffered what no tongue can tell. My folly began in smoke, but ended in flame. I must bury the past, but, God helping me, I shall live a different life in the future ; and I hope

my voice will yet be often heard against what men call the fragrant, but what I call the fatal, weed."

It was the beginning of new days. He arose a chastened man, returned to the place where he had fallen, and there redeemed his character. He is now a sober, honoured man. Most of his smoking companions have come to grief. None of them are yet great men. Fred has become wise. He is no bigot. He knows and admits that there are instances of successful men who smoke ; but he yet emphatically insists that all young men who learn to smoke take a downward step which has ruined multitudes of them in a few years, and he is resolved to cry aloud and spare not against one of the worst, because most insidious and harmless looking, indulgences of the present day. If his better experience should warn others, he will not have suffered nor written in vain.

THE "THOROUGHGOING" PLEDGE.

I PROMISE, by Divine Assistance, to Abstain from
all Beverages that contain Alcohol. Also from
Opium, Chloral, Chlorodyne, and Tobacco in every form.

For information about the Temperance Catechism, Pledge Cards, Tracts, or Pamphlets, and how to form an Anti-Tobacco Auxiliary, address, SECRETARY, ANTI-NARCOTIC LEAGUE, 25, Market Street, Manchester.

Illustrated Series on Smoking.]

[No. 4.]