

{ A Sorrowful Story

Without mentioning his name, I will give you a sad story and let you decide who it is I am writing about. It is an "open secret" and some, who read these lines, will know at once the unfortunate subject of this sketch, what a checkered career he led, and what a world of sympathy he needed.

Up to his thirtieth year, before and while he lived in Ames (a goodly number of years), he was an excellent citizen, a loyal member of the G.A.R., a clean man in his personal life, a courtly mannered businessman, a good-looker, whose clothes always fitted him, and one of the most popular "men of the world" that one ever met.

Along in the seventies he sold out his interests in Ames and went into the clothing business at Huron. From the first there was a fine prospect of making a success of the undertaking. He had a partner, who also was a good businessman of some experience, and for a time their trade was "booming." There was one drawback. There were saloons in Huron and it was the prevailing custom among merchants of the town to take a customer out and buy him a glass of beer when he bought a suit of clothes. Of course, if he asked his customers to drink, naturally he must

drink with them. If his trade was good, it meant much treating. This meant frequent drinking and the shores of time are strewn with the wrecks of noble manhood who found out, when it was too late, that the man who "gets in" with "let's take a drink" will be beaten. The adage proved true in this case. It soon became apparent that the drink habit was becoming fastened upon our friend. It was no rare thing to see him so much under the influence of drink, that his friends all observed it. Finally, his partner was obliged to propose a dissolution of their business relationship. This was amicably accomplished with no letup in the downward course on which our friend was started. He seemed powerless to loosen the grip which so firmly held him chained to his pitiful destiny.

I called on him every year in the course of his residence in Huron. I noticed the downward tendency of his course until the change came in his relations with his partner. I often did business with the firm, both before and after the dissolution. He finally got a position on the road as a salesman and went back to his former vocation. He could have made a fine success of it, as he did before I took his place, but he was doomed to a slavery of habit so hindering and so disastrous that before many years he became unbalanced in his mental calculations. In such a state he attempted to cross the track before an approaching passenger train in Cedar Rapids and falling, lost

his leg and became a cripple for the rest of his life.

Going back to Huron, he entered politics and was elected county clerk in repeated elections. Each time the office was given to him on his promise to be "quiet," which he tried to keep. Failing miserably and without the forbearance of his family, his superiors refused to keep him in office and he left the county courthouse. A great group of friends, comrades, and acquaintances knew he was "entering the last ditch," for he went to the South Dakota soldiers home.

At Ames and Huron he had a delightful home while these places were his residence. His wife was a noble woman of culture and refinement. One son and one daughter blessed their union. But his course in life broke his wife's heart and darkened the childhood years of both son and daughter.

At Hot Springs, in the soldiers home, the poor man was the abject victim and bondsman of his sorrowful habit. I went to see him in his years of retirement, in the care and guardianship of Uncle Sam, and each time he talked freely regarding his life, his family, and his future. On one occasion I went to Hot Springs to give an address and my poor friend was among the G.A.R. comrades who "came in a body" to attend the meeting. There was one element in this man's case that was quite peculiar. Not until the end did his face show the slightest evidence of dissipation. His face was fair and "good to look upon." He was always

well-dressed and on every occasion, when I met him, he had the air, the manner, and the appearance of a gentleman. At Hot Springs he gave himself up to the habit of using other drugs and told me himself "it was more and worse slavery than the drink habit."

He finally reached that stage when life seemed to lose its attractions. His wife died. His children were separated, one in the east, one in the west. He had some old friends; one kept a nice clean, homelike hotel in Illinois. He received a pension of twenty-four dollars. He concluded an arrangement with his old friend to board him, do his washing and mending for fifteen dollars a month for life, till the end came. This left him nine dollars a month for drink and drugs. He went from the "home" at Hot Springs to be with his old-time friend in northern Illinois. A wealthy friend in Chicago (for he won a host of friends among all classes) sent him his own partly worn suits.

On the occasion of my last visit with him, a few months before he died, he looked and talked well. He appeared to have as good prospect for life as myself and, in our "heart to heart" talk in his room, he said to me while unshed tears blurred our eyes, "It's no use, Capt., there will be no change. It will be just like this till the end comes."

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