

a community called ...

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MY FIRST DRINK
AND MY LAST

BY

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MY FIRST DRINK, AND MY LAST.

IT was on a beautiful moonlight night in October. I was walking with a friend and we had been to a neighbor's, where he bought a pint of whisky. I was past eighteen years of age. I had been raised in a log cabin in a sparsely settled neighborhood in a western State. My mother was the dearest Christian woman I ever knew; she was the daughter of a Massachusetts clergyman. My father was an educated Christian gentleman—a New Hampshire man—and our home, log cabin though it was, certainly was the purest spot I had ever seen on earth. Never did I

hear an evil word spoken there, and whisky and tobacco were unknown in our house.

I had promised my dear mother I would never drink; but this friend, who was the miller of our county, told me that he would never speak to me again if I did not drink, and that he would think I had some grudge against him, or that I felt myself above him socially. I took the bottle after he had coaxed me a full half hour, and put it to my lips and drank. Shall I ever forget that moment? The vow I had made to my dear mother was broken, and the devil came in and took full possession.

My mother died a short time after this, happily in ignorance of my sin. I was away from home that day, but her last words were, "Tell Hopkins to meet me in heaven." When I reached home in the evening, before I could dismount from my horse my sisters came out and told me that mother was dead. I could not believe it, so they took my hands and led me into the "spare room," and there, cold in death, was my darling, precious mother!

I could not believe that the silent form wrapped in white was she, so pale, so still. From my earliest recollection she had been the last one I ever saw at night and the first one in the morning. I begged her, with a breaking heart, to speak to me. How my broken vow came back to me, as I stood by that dear lifeless form, so peaceful, so sweet! I promised God, and her, that I would never break it again. Three days after mother was buried I was more drunk than I had ever been before.

Our home was broken up, for father soon died. I went to live with a prominent physician in the village and began the study of medicine. My preceptor, though one of the most brilliant men in his profession, was a heavy drinker, and in one year I was a confirmed drunkard.

I gave up my studies, took a traveling position, became a professional gambler, and for fifteen years rarely went to bed sober. For many years I did not see my danger, or was too much under the influence of rum to think

seriously on the subject. Occasionally, however, ominous forebodings would arise in my heart, and I would wonder what the end would be.

In 1870 I came to New York city, and soon accepted a position with a salary of \$300 a month, with a liberal allowance for expenses. The failure of the establishment I was working for threw me out of a position, and I never was able to command a good salary afterward. I cannot describe here the remorse and heart-aches of the confirmed drunkard, who feels himself slowly though surely slipping down to that awful abyss, the drunkard's hell—a foretaste of which he already feels in his soul! I passed through it all—more than human pen can write. Many times, while my faithful, loving wife would be holding me in her arms, would I see fiends in the most hellish forms walk round behind me, and, holding their mouths so close I could feel their scorching breath, tell me what to do. This advice, whether true or imaginary, always tended toward my self-destruction.

Then they would go into the next room, and talk so loud about my case I was sure my wife would hear their evil plottings and be frightened out of her senses.

One Tuesday evening, on the 18th of April, 1882, I sat in a saloon in Harlem, a homeless, friendless, dying drunkard. I had pawned or sold every thing that would bring a drink. I could not sleep unless I was dead drunk. I had not eaten for days, and for four nights preceding I had suffered with delirium tremens, or the horrors, from midnight till morning. I had often said, "I will never be a tramp; I will never be cornered; for when that time comes, if it ever does, I will find a home in the bottom of the river!" But the Lord so ordered it that when that time did come I was not able to walk one quarter of the way to the river. As I sat there thinking, I seemed to feel some great and mighty Presence. I did not know then what it was. I did learn afterward that it was Jesus, the sinner's Friend. I walked up to the bar and pounded it with my fist till I made the glasses rattle.

Those who stood by drinking looked on with scornful curiosity. I said I would never take another drink if I died in the street; and I felt as if that would happen before morning. Something said, "If you want to keep this promise, go and have yourself locked up." I went to the nearest station-house, a short distance away, and had myself locked up.

I was placed in a narrow cell, and it seemed as though all the demons that could find room came into that place with me. This was not all the company I had, either. No, praise the Lord! that dear Spirit that came to me in the saloon was present, and said, "Pray!" I did pray; and though I did not feel any great help I kept on praying. As soon as I was able to leave my cell I was taken to the police court and remanded back to the cell. I was finally released, and found my way to my brother's house, where every care was given me. While lying in bed the admonishing Spirit never left me, and when I arose the following Sabbath morning I felt that that day would decide my fate. Many plans were

turned over in my mind, but all were rejected, and toward evening it came into my head to go to Jerry McAuley's Mission. I went. The house was packed, and with great difficulty I made my way to the space near the platform. There I saw the apostle to the drunkard and the outcast—that man of God, Jerry McAuley. He rose, and amid deep silence told his experience, that simple story that I heard so many hundred times afterward, but which was ever new; how he had been a thief, an outcast, a drunkard—“yes, a regular old bum! but I gave my heart to God, and he saved me from every thing that's wicked and bad.”

There was a sincerity about this man and his testimony that carried conviction with it, and I found myself saying, “I wonder if God can save me?” I listened to the testimony of twenty-five or thirty persons, every one of whom had been saved from rum, and I made up my mind that I would be saved or die right there. When the invitation was given I knelt down with quite a crowd of drunkards.

Never shall I forget that scene! How I wondered if I would be saved! if God would help me! I was a total stranger; but I felt I had sympathy, and it helped me. Jerry made the first prayer. I shall never forget it. He said: "Dear Saviour, won't you look down in pity on these poor souls? They need your help, Lord; they can't get along without it. Blessed Jesus, these poor sinners have got themselves into a bad hole. Won't you help them out? Speak to them, Lord! do, for Jesus' sake! Amen."

Then Mrs. McAuley prayed fervently for us, and Jerry said: "Now all keep on your knees and keep praying, while I ask these dear souls to pray for themselves."

He spoke to one after another, as he placed his hand on their heads, saying, "Brother, you pray. Now tell the Lord just what you want him to do for you." How I trembled as he approached me! Though I had knelt down with the determination to give my heart to God, when it came to the very moment of grand decision I felt like backing out. The

devil knelt by my side and whispered in my ear crimes I had forgotten for months: "What are you going to do about such and such matters, if you start to be a Christian to-night? Now you can't afford to make a mistake; had not you better think this matter over a while and try to fix up some of the troubles you are in, and then start?"

O what a conflict was going on for my poor soul! A blessed whisper said, "Come!" The devil said, "Be careful!" Jerry's hand was on my head. He said, "Brother, pray." I said, "Can't you pray for me?" Jerry said, "All the prayers in the world won't save you unless you pray for yourself." I halted but a moment, and then, with a breaking heart, I said, "Dear Jesus, can you help me?"

Never with mortal tongue can I describe that moment. Although up to that time my soul had been filled with indescribable gloom, I felt the glorious brightness of the noonday sun shine into my heart; I felt I was a free man. O, the precious feeling of safety, of

freedom, of resting on Jesus! I felt that Christ, with all his brightness and power, had come into my life; that indeed old things had passed away and all things had become new.

From that moment till now I have never wanted a drink of whisky, and I have never seen money enough to make me take one. I promised God that night that if he would take away the appetite for strong drink I would work for him all my life. He has done his part, and I have been trying to do mine. Nor did I ever, even by accident, swear an oath, though before I could not speak ten consecutive words without an oath. I began the next day to work for Christ, by inviting a tramp to come to the meetings. He came, and went up for prayers.

A few weeks afterward the Lord showed me that I was leaning on tobacco, and that it was better for me to lean entirely on him. I threw my plug of tobacco away one night down the aisle in the mission, and the desire was removed. In fact, my tobacco was

the only sacrifice I ever made for Jesus, as I would gladly have paid money to be rid of rum, if I could have been relieved that way.

Four years afterward I was called by the trustees of the old McAuley Water Street Mission to take charge of the work. Almost every night God is displaying his wondrous power here in saving the drunkard, the thief, and the outcast. Pray for us!

“ Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.”

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