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THE NEW OVER-COAT.

It was Christmas-day, but the festivities of that occasion scarcely existed for the Harford family. The mother had done her best to make it seem like Christmas; but her drunken husband had just slammed the door behind him, while she, her face flushed with a blow, turned to her boy, Fred, who had sunk down by the fireside, and given himself up to melancholy thoughts.

While sitting thus, Fred formed a resolution. He would go to the city and find employment; he would be sober and industrious, and afford that help and comfort to his poor mother which she could look for from no other source.

Fred carried out his determination. Two years passed by, and he was to come home to spend Christmas. It was early in the morning when he reached home, and proceeded to wake his mother in a novel manner. He commenced one of their old familiar carols, which he had many a time sung with the little ones at home. Not a jot cared he whether he awoke the whole neighborhood or not with his resonant tenor voice, so that he awoke his mother, and so that she recognized his voice. That was all he cared for. But Mrs. Harford was already awake. Thoughts of her boy had made her sleepless, and she had heard the swift footsteps clanging down the streets, and then stop suddenly at her door, when the singing began; and although it made her heart leap, for she fancied she knew the step, and how well she knew the carol! But the voice? It might be her boy's, but if so, how changed—how deep and manly! A knock followed the carol, during the singing of which she had hastily dressed herself, tumbling over herself almost in her haste, and making a noise which awoke the children in the next room, though it did not wake her husband. He was sleeping off a drunken fit, and it would have taken something a little less noisy than booming cannon to arouse him.

In a moment she was at the door, and mother and son were in each other's arms. After a long embrace she stood away to look him up and down, and after a fond survey, she said, "How you are grown, Fred! and how well you look! and how well-to-do in that great-coat: it makes you look quite the gentleman!"

"It's a real treasure, mother," said Fred; "and dosen't it keep the cold out!"

"I should think so," said the mother, laying her hand upon it appreciatively. "It's a beautiful thick cloth, Fred. How did you manage to get it out of your small earnings, after what you've sent me? I'm sure I've been afraid that you did not leave yourself a penny scarcely."

"You needn't have been afraid, mother. Why, I've got a watch, too! look here. I gave fifty shillings for it."

"La, Fred! how ever did you manage it?"

"I'll tell you by-and-by, mother. Now please help me off with my great-coat; for my hands have got the frost in them to-night. I had half a mind to bring this coat for father. But then, thinks I, it would soon be lodged at uncle's—easy come, easy go, you know—so I decided rather to tell father how to get one as I got this: he'll prize it all the more for getting it so."

How merrily the breakfast-time passed, and what a happy day they hoped to spend! The sunshine was come into the house at last; it lighted up the faces of the sad mother and her children, and made all bright. Toward nine o'clock the merry hubbub in the house awoke Mr. Harford; and learning that Fred was come, he set himself to the dreaded task of getting up.

Presently the church-bells began to chime, and Fred proposed that they should go to their house of worship. "I shall be glad to see the familiar old place again," he said. All the children wanted to go with Fred, and he wanted his father to go too. He refused quite decidedly at first; it was out of the question, he said, and he never went to church now. "All the more reason why you should go to-day, father," urged Fred.

"But I've got nothing fit to put on," said the father.

"Yes, you have," said the wife; "your best coat is up stairs."

"How came it there?" he asked, in astonishment.

"Never mind about this now," said Mrs. Harford; "but just go and make yourself spruce, and go out with Fred this once. We may never meet together on a Christmas-day again, you know."

"Look at Fred's coat—what a beauty!" cried Susie, as Fred took it from a peg behind the door.

"Why, Fred, you look as though you were getting on in the world," said his father. "How did you manage to get that and your watch too?"

"You must know I haven't spent a farthing of my wages on them," said Fred.

"Then how in the world did you get them?"

"The price of half a pint of beer a day for nearly three years got these for me," said Fred.

"All the fellows at our place are allowed half a pint a day. I told master that I'd rather not have any, and if he liked to make me any allowance for my not having it, he might; or I'd just leave it, and say nothing about an allowance. He said he liked to encourage young fellows to be abstainers, and allowed me three half-pence a day. That has been faithfully given me for about two years and nine months, and has been something like six pounds five shillings in my pocket. With that, you see, I have been well able to buy my watch and coat, and to send home some little Christmas gifts last year, as well as to bring these."

"Who'd ever ha' thought that three half-pence a day saved would have run up to that in less than three years?" said Mr. Harford, thinking dolefully of the many pence, and not only pence, but sixpences, he had spent day after day during that time and for years before—sixpences that made many pounds, which would have bought him coats, watch, and perhaps a house too—so many had he squandered. Ned was trying to do a sum of the same kind in mental arithmetic, though with lower figures than those which came to his father's mind; and both began a series of self-reproachings, and both felt that they had been foolish in the highest degree.

"You did well—you did well, Fred," said his father with a sigh.

Then Mr. Harford and his children went to church. When they returned Mrs. Harford seemed much surprised to see her husband returning with the rest; and she bustled about with a glad heart to get her Christmas dinner, just as in the happy days of long, long ago.

Mr. Harford managed to eat a pretty good meal, and felt the better for it. When it was over, and oranges and other good things brought by Fred were being discussed, his listless air quite passed away, and he playfully helped the children to make wonderful things with orange-peel. By-and-by he leaned back in his chair, and said, "I can't believe it's me sitting here at home like this—something like the poor fellow as our parson was reading of this morning, as was sitting 'clothed, and in his right mind.'"

"Ah, it does me good to see you," said his wife, with glistening eyes.

He looked down at his coat to avoid her glance, and said, "This may look tidy, missis, but it don't keep the cold out; I was regular nipped coming home from chapel."

"You ought to have a great-coat like Fred's," she replied. "You might easy get one, as he did, afore next winter."

"What! save three half-pence a day? 'Course I could, and I'll begin," he said.

"But I did something more than that, father," said Fred. "If I hadn't, I might just have gone on saving for a month or two, and then let it all go."

"What did you do?"

"Why, I just kept right away from the public houses. They're the places to keep one from having a coat to one's back; they strip you, if you frequent them; but they'll never clothe you. You'll begin to save three half-pence a day for a great-coat, father, as you say; but will you do the other thing? If you only would, I'll tell you what you'd get besides. Why, good boots, good hat, a watch in your pocket, clothes for the youngsters, good food and plenty of it, a comfortable, happy home and wife, heal'th of body, and a clear and peaceful mind."

"Surely, surely!" chimed in Mrs. Hartord, in a half-sad, half-hopeful tone.

"And only *one* thing robs you of all that, father. You know what it is, and how to conquer it, too; our minister told it all so beautifully this morning. God gives the victory over all evil, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Only we must not be still, and leave the fighting to our Captain; we must strive and struggle hard to overcome, relying on His help. You remember that he said all that, father?"

"Yes, I minded it well. It seemed all for me. I thought then, if I could only begin striving I might overcome. Others—hundreds and thousands of others—have fought against this cursed habit of drinking, and overcome it."

"So may you," said Mrs. Harford. "Why, you've began already, James. Think! you haven't had a drop to-day! All you've got to do is just to go on as you've begun, that all."

"That'll be enough, I guess, as the days go on. Still, folks say as the first step is the hardest, and I've taken the first, you say?"

"Yes, yes."

"Ah, and I feel it too. Fred, my boy, if we all live till next Christmas we'll have a dinner of our own buying, please God, and not of yours; and if you come to see us, I'll have as respectable a great-coat on as you."

"And I too," said Ned, standing up very straight to give emphasis to his words. "No more o' *my* tin shall go into the publics, not if I know it. I knows a trick o' getting the value of it now, as I didn't think of afore I saw Fred's great-coat."

So, to make a long story short, it came to pass that Fred's great-coat was an instrument chosen to work quite a revolution in Harford's home. Did you ever know a man give in who commenced climbing upward and onward, with a strong determination, and relying upon God for strength and assistance? Never.

No, he did not give in; and the happy Christmas-day which they spent on the occasion of Fred's memorable visit was the first of a long series of happy ones. The sunshine that he brought did *not* fade away; it brightened and brightened into a perpetual glow of comfort and peace.

Fred did come home again on the following Christmas, and walked to chapel with his parents and brothers and sisters; but he was not the only one that went out of the house with a great-coat on his back that day; there were two others who had got them in the same way as he got his. He wore the same one that he had appeared in on his first visit. "It still looks almost as good as new," he said, "and I shall keep it tidy as I can. It has been the means of doing so much good that I have a sort of strong affection for my first great-coat which I could never have for any other."

Speaking of a pastor who had been requested to preach to children, *The Congregationalist* says:

"He now replies that, having given the subject due reflection, he has concluded to preach regularly to the children, with a sermon one Sabbath afternoon in the month to adults. He says that the main hope of the church is the rising generation. The thoughts and intents of his grown-up hearers are in the main fixed: but those of the youth are yet to be shaped and directed. If he can get the boys and girls of to-day for Christ, he has made sure of the men and women of to-morrow. His business is to carry the lambs."

Who'll Turn the Grindstone?

When I was a little boy, I remember one cold winter's morning I was accosted by a smiling man, with an axe on his shoulder—"My pretty boy," said he, "Has your father a grindstone?" "Yes, sir," said I. "You are a fine little fellow," said he, "will you let me grind my axe on it?" Pleased with his compliment of "fine little fellow," "Oh yes, sir," I answered, "it is down in the shop."—'And will you, my man,' said he, patting me on the head, 'get a little hot water?" How could I refuse? I ran, and soon brought a kettle full. "How old are you and what's your name?" continued he. Without waiting for a reply, "I am sure you are one of the finest lads that I have ever seen; will you just turn a few minutes for me? Tickled with the flattery, like a little fool I went to work, and bitterly did I rue the day. It was a new axe, and I toiled and tugged till I was almost tired to death. The school bell rung and I could not get away: my hands were blistered, and it was not half ground. At length, however, the axe was sharpened, and the man turned to me with, "Now, you little rascal, you've played the truant; scud to school or you'll rue it." Alas, thought I, it was hard enough to turn a grindstone this cold day, but now to be called a little rascal was too much. It sunk deep into my mind, and often have I thought of it since.

When I see a merchant over polite to his customers, begging them to taste a little brandy and throwing his goods on the counter, thinks I, that man has an axe to grind.

When I see a man flattering the people, making great professions of attachment to liberty, who is in private life a tyrant—methinks, lookout, good people, that fellow will set you turning grindstones.

When I see a man hoisted into office by party spirit, without a single qualification to render him either respectable or useful—alas, methinks, deluded people, you are doomed for a season to turn the grindstone for a booby.

It is related that an Indian once brought up a young lion, and, finding him weak and harmeless, never attempted to control him. Evevery day the lion gained in strength and became more difficult to manage. At last, when excited by rage, he fell upon the Indian and tore him to pieces. It is thus with evil habits and bad passions. They are like this lion—they will cause much vexation in after life, and may perhaps destroy us. Youth, remember and beware.

Surpreme devotion to money-getting lowers the tone of public virtue, and tends to make men gross and material. There is a show of respect for religion; churches are built and theological schools endowed, but still there is a lack of deep spiritual piety. Nothing but an "aggressive christianity" can successfully grapple with the materialism of the age.