

BITETH LIKE AN ADDER

THE CONFESSIONS OF A VICTIM OF THE MORPHINE AND WHISKEY HABITS.

ANDREW D. COWLES' EXPERIENCE

He Tells How the Use of Stimulants and Opiates Grew Upon Him Until the Almost Fatal Night in Durham—The Awful Delusions that Flitted through His Fevered Brain—His Attack upon Mr. Cobb and the Carpenter and His Attempt at Suicide.

GREENSBORO, N. C., Sept. 20. To the Editor of the News and Observer:

In "As you like it" you will find the bard of Avon, although bibulous in his habits and a votary of Bacchus' himself, exclaiming, "It is strange that men will put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains;" and Adam a character in the same immortal creation, proudly in his old age proclaims, "My age is as lustrous winter, frosty but kindly, for in my youth I never did apply hot and rebellious liquors in my blood." Truly it is one of the paradoxes of life that any sane person would willfully embitter the past, and jeopardize the future by sensual indulgence in the present. Alas, alas, it is only too true, and while Sliak spears was not strictly accurate in declaring that justice had fled to brutish beasts, he was correct in his assertion "that men had lost their reason."

Byron, of whom Taine said, "Thus lived and died this great and unhappy man; the malady of his age had no more distinguished prey," in a mad condition declared that the best of life was but intoxication and that man being reasonable must get drunk; and not satisfied in falsifying a true proposition, that revolts at such stupendous folly, he breaks out in ecstatic rapture, mounts Pegasus and with a brain reeling, perverted and polluted after a midnight carnival of vice and vicious pleasure, which are like Dead Sea apples, he says: "Fill the goblet again, for I never before felt the glow that now gladdens my heart to its core. Let us drink; who would not, since through life's varied round, in the goblet alone, no deception is found."

This tribute to the most fiendish, cruel and unrelenting enemy of the human family, emanating from Lord Byron, whose delightful melody makes every chord of the heart vibrate in unison with his own, sounds pretty and robs vice of its disgusting semblance, shape and form. The youth of our country forget, in their rapture of admiration for his undisputed genius, that he was not a safe guide; that he was a gay Lothario, a libertine, and that fathers were seen leaving public receptions in Italy, with their daughters, when he was present. They regarded him as a social leper. Go to the Book of Books, and be interrogated: "Who hath weep? Who hath sorrow? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? He that tarrieth long at the wine cup. Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it moveth itself aright, for at last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder. Oh had I the power I would burn this awful warning into the heart and mind of every young man in the land, for sorrow, degradation, despair and death follow the violation of moral and physical laws as the night the day. Five hundred thousand drunkards are marching to the grave, the jails and poor houses to-day. Most of them will reach their destination. Where are the recruits to come from? Father: Mother, is it your boy, who is now a genteel tippler? Oh no, he will never drink, he is strong. So was Samson but he became weak.

I was strong but temptation was stronger. For eight years I fought the demon of intemperance. I joined the church and surrounded myself with all the influences that pointed to a higher and nobler life. In an unguarded moment I took a quarter grain of morphine for laryngitis. I almost cried "Eureka!" I had found the elixir of life, but I soon discovered in its potent power concealed hell. Before I was aware of its insidious effect I was a victim, tied hand and foot—an habitue, struggling for release, when bound with cables. If I cried out in the night, the echo of my voice sounded like the hissing of fiends in hell. Shut or open my eyes, these demons of despair and lost souls were there, shaking their gory locks at me. I could see in form as palpable as my own, the grinning skull and eyesless holes, but I struggled on. I went to Durham on the 14th of August. For several days under the goad of whiskey and morphine I did business, but the abuse of myself several months with the present quantity of whiskey and narcotics rapidly drove me on and on to the climax.

"Canst not minister to a mind diseased, Or pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow?"

The State papers have had a great deal to say about my performance at Durham on the 7th inst. For a warning to other young men who are singly addicted or doubly addicted I regard it a duty I owe them to describe my thrilling experience—an experience I would not pass through again for the wash of the Indies, but one which any man might go through at any time who uses morphine or whiskey.

Although stopping at the Carolina Hotel, whose table was laden with everything calculated to tempt the appetite, I could eat nothing. For ten days I had not been to the table. I had used morphine, whiskey and absinthe. I had no perception of delirium. At 12 m on the 7th I remember a pleasant conversation with Gen. Cameron and Capt. W. W. Grayson, of Raleigh. They went east and I walked down to a bar room and took a drink. Returning to the hotel, I started to my room on the third floor, and when I reached the second floor I was fully in the power of delirium and a plant prey for all kinds of delusions and dangerous hallucinations. A man, created in my imagination, called me to the western end of the hall, told me there was a desperate fight about to commence, and I was selected to lead the Republicans. Don't you hear the mounted men huzzzing? Yes. Listen at the horses hoofs

as they strike the stony street. Yes I bear them, and they are coming nearer, nearer; now they are in the house. I hear the jingle of their spurs and the clanking of their sabres and the rattle of their carbines. With brain afire, and uplifted chair I stood about watching every avenue of advance, heard distinctly the orders to kill me and give no quarter, expected to be shot every moment. My delirium was assuming a fearful state. The voices ceased. I cried in my madness, "Stand boys or we are dead men." Promptly a voice responded, "We are with you." Looking in the direction whence the sounds proceeded, and oh, horror of horrors, right over my head seemingly ready to drop, the deadly implement was an old skull with an axe without handle, between its teeth, with the edge toward me. I moved to the other side of the hall, passed, and as I did so I spied a carpenter, with tools around him. I asked him for a hatchet. He held up a whip-saw. I insisted on having the hatchet. He refused to let me have it. Then I said: "What are you anyhow—Democrat or Republican?" He said: "Don't you know?" I replied, "No!" He said: "I am a Democrat; may I go to your room with you?" I said: "Yes, if you desire."

Then, this imaginary interlocutor walked rapidly with me twenty feet and the proprietor, Mr. Cobb, and several others cried, "For shame, the fight and danger over Cowles is a coward, for he was afraid to go to his room alone. I protested that no such construction should be placed on my conduct, that I had defended, single-handed, the west wing of the corridor, and had never moved till ordered. I could then see in form at least a hundred scowling, angry, contemptuous faces. The proprietor told me to prepare for a horrible death. A drummer came in, registered and asked permission to see the execution. The clerk repeatedly asked me to let him feel my pulse, twitted me by charging that I was afraid to die and was crying. He told me to get down on my knees and beseech the heavenly throne; asked me where I wanted the little they were still where buried; and the carpenter still worked away on the addition to the office. I was assured by demons conjured up by the accursed morphine that at 4 o'clock I was to be subjected to indignities too gross to mention. My eyelids were to be cut off, my ears and nose were to share the same fate. I was to be hung up, head downward, nails driven through my feet, skinned from waist to arms and then hot boiling tar was to be applied. Great drops of sweat rolled off of me. The people in the street seemed wild after my blood. The bells rung; the tramp of the mad populace was unceasing and incessant. Squads of men were hurrying here and there, singing, cursing and shouting that they were going to hang Andrew Cowles. "When," was asked, "Four o'clock," was the answer. "For what?" "Why, for cowardice."

So intense was my excitement I neglected to brace on morphine. So real was the phantasmagoria I regarded it as useless to make an attempt at relief or escape. I had passed the point where Hope could solace or comfort. The sky was rayless and the beetling clouds hung heavily without a silver lining over me. I was too proud to beg for mercy, and too weak to command it. I made no plaint, asked no quarter, and was entirely oblivious of possessing within myself any immortal quality whatever. The time was fast approaching when I should shuffle off this mortal coil, and go to that country whence no traveller returns. So real was it, that I never questioned their right of condemnation. Hurriedly I walked a limited space over the tiled floor of the lobby, and looking at the clock it marked 3:30 p. m. At 4 I must die. The optical delusion in showing me 100 men had passed away. There was a lull. I furtively glanced my eye over the lobby and corridors, saw a negro on a ladder about ten feet from the ground, working away on the new office, and Mr. Howell Cobb, proprietor, and at my feet I found three hatchets. Four o'clock seemed to be a fatal hour. Then I must die. There was no appeal. Those who sat in judgment were obdurate. They demanded their pound of flesh. I had never failed to defend myself—why should I now? By all the laws of hospitality recognized in the rude tent of the Bedouin, equally with civilized nations. I thought Mr. Cobb had grossly proven recreant. By this time I was mad, hopeless, desperate. Anticipating the hour of four I quickly raised the hatchets, intending to kill the carpenter first, and then Mr. Cobb. I hurled hatchet No. 1 with terrific force at the carpenter. He saw me in time, and by falling clear, escaped the deadly missile. Then as quick as a flash I sent another at Mr. Cobb, the blade of which did not miss his throat half an inch, but thank God it inflicted no wound on him. Cobb

jerked the drawer open I presume to get a revolver, shutting it quickly he jumped up on the desk with a large lamp and let fly. He struck me above the temple and such was the force of the blow that he turned me around. He doubtless would have broken my skull had I not had a stiff derby hat on. I hurried to the wash-room, locked the door, and was determined to defend myself to the last as I was sure I was to be tortured and fearing to fall into the hands of these people who were really trying to save me from myself, I tried to cut my throat. Fortunately the hatchet was dull. Then I tried to go to the brain through the temple with the corner of the hatchet. By this time at least 500 people had assembled. Some were at the door and others at the screen window. Some had weapons of offence, others of defence, and in my delirium I imagined these parties whom I could see were members of the mob. Keeping my eye on the window, I sat on the marble wash stand near the door, and had the crowd broken in I would doubtless have killed three before they could have killed me. Imagining it was only a question of a short time and sure I was to be tortured I cut my temple till from loss of blood I was unable to raise the hatchet. The police discovering this broke through the window tossed the hatchet, put me in an ambulance and hurried me to the hospital to save me if possible.

As the wagon rattled over the rocky street, I became reconciled to my doom. I was being taken to the place of execution. I was alternately submerged in water and then enveloped in fire. My system was alike impervious to both. The water shocked not, the fire burned not. The phantasm was so real that I felt like sands in the hour glass of my life were about run down. I begged them to shoot me—shut my eyes so that they might place the deadly pistol to my temple. I was sure I was dying, and in my delirium troops of old friends stood around me. I was at home again and they had come to perform the last sad offices for me. Every feature on every face was plain and clear cut. My imagination was at a high tension. I shrieked that I was a martyr to civil liberty in one breath and that I was a victim of political conspirators in the next.

And all this was caused by the excessive use and abuse of morphine. The devil has no agent so powerful to use. It is sure death, despair, degradation to the user, but it does not stop with the unhappy victim—in a moment of delirium the father's hand is often imbrued in the blood of her whom he has sworn to support, and of the little ones, pledges of their affection. Dante's Inferno, in delineation of horrible things, can furnish no parallel to the horrors of an imagination wrought up by morphine. The whole nature of man is changed, and he is transformed into a fiend, alike dangerous to himself and all around him. He draws the demons of hell to his bosom and is pleased with his company. They regard him safely thus and go on tempting others who are sure to fall. You may think you can use it and conceal it, but be sure your sins will find you out. And if there are any morphine habitues, whose eyes may peruse these lines, I will feel that I have not trod the wine press in vain, if they are induced by my awful experience, to stop at once; and

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