

TOM BROWN'S RESOLUTION AND  
AND CAME OF IT.

[A CHRISTMAS STORY.]

In the year of grace 1870 there lived in Woolfe Street, Liverpool, a carpenter, or joiner, who was generally known as Tom Brown. He was a married man and had three children, aged respectively eight, five, and three years. Tom had thus a family of five to provide for. He was considered by his shopmates to be a remarkably steady man, as indeed he was. He was not a total abstainer from intoxicating drinks, but no one had ever seen him under the influence of liquor, and as a rule he reached home at a reasonable hour every night. I should have said reached his "rooms," for Tom was only a lodger. It cannot be said that he was a model husband. Like too many of his class, he kept his smiles for his companions and took his frowns home with him. He seldom spoke a kindly word to his wife, and she, a very fine specimen of an English woman, patiently resigned herself to her lot, finding her chief joy in the love of her children, upon whom she lavished a wealth of love and a world of care. When Tom came home he always found his family well cared for, clean and tidy. Now if he was proud of anything it was of his children. He frequently took home candy in his pocket for them; he would even play with them and allow them to climb upon his knees; yet he was frequently so ill-tempered and morose that they would instinctively avoid him and play by themselves in a corner. As a consequence of Tom's disposition his wife knew very little of his business affairs, and seldom ventured to ask where he was going or where he had been.

Had anybody dared to hint to Tom that he was not a model husband, he would indeed have been insulted. Being a good and steady workman he found constant employment. His earnings amounted to thirty-three shillings per week (eight dollars), and of this sum he regularly gave his wife twenty-eight, keeping five for "pocket money and tobacco." Tom always expected, and even demanded, good food. His wife could therefore save nothing, and they were living, as the saying goes, from hand to mouth.

In England there has been for the past thirty years a very large number of societies called "Tontines," and in 1870 the members almost invariably met in a large room attached to some public-house (or saloon). Into these societies working men pay a certain sum per week for fifty-two

weeks, with the understanding that at Christmas there shall be an equal division among the members of all the money in the treasury. Certain amounts are paid during sickness, and a few pounds in the case of death; but as a rule all these allowances are met by levies and fines, and generally at Christmas a society to the funds of which a working man has been contributing a shilling per week will hand over to each of its members from twelve to fourteen dollars. The worst feature about these societies is that they are held at a public-house, and the temptation to drink is increased by the fact that the landlord himself is nearly always the "treasurer." It is his duty, therefore, to pay over the money to the members. Tom was a member of two of these "institutions." His wife knew about one of them; but Tom carefully kept all knowledge of the second from her, and to that end had selected a house a considerable distance from where he resided.

In the early part of the year he was constant in his attendance at the weekly meetings of the second society, and had become very friendly with several of its members, so much so indeed that he frequently reached home with an empty pocket, all his money having been spent in drink. This compelled him either to borrow or go without his tobacco. Now it so happened that on going to the meeting, as usual, one evening he became involved in a dispute with one of the members. Matters took such a fierce turn that the two men had to be separated in order to prevent a fight. It has already been stated that Tom possessed a very hasty and passionate temper. He had one good quality: If he formed a resolution, or made a promise, nothing could induce him to break his word. His determination was strong. After leaving the club-room he remarked to his companions that the cause of all this trouble was the drink, having said which he paused, and then, with emphasis exclaimed, "I'll not drink another drop for any man until Christmas." True to his resolution, Tom neither drank nor paid for drink. As a result he found his five shillings amply sufficient to pay his tontine money and furnish him with all he needed.

Slowly but surely the wheels of time rolled on, until Tom found himself going towards home on the evening of December 23d. Talking to himself he said, "Let me see. I have £2 12s. to get at tontine No. 1 and £2 13s. at tontine No. 2, and my wages are 33s. Why that makes £6 18s., and Tom fairly skipped

along the street with joy. This sum to be received all in one week, and on one day, seemed like untold wealth, and for once he met his wife with a smile, and gladdened his three little ones by giving them an extra large quantity of candy and treating them with unusual kindness. Supper being over he turned to his wife and said, "Why, Sarah, tomorrow is Christmas eve, and we are to be paid our wages at half-past twelve. See here, Sarah, I'll be home by two o'clock at the latest, and we'll just have a cup of tea, and then for once we will take the children out and get them some nice things for Christmas. So you had best have them all ready." Sarah was only too glad to promise, and as for the children, their delight knew no bounds. The little ones were so full of anticipation and joy that they had difficulty in falling asleep. They were up betimes in the morning, and gave their mother no peace until she had dressed them and allowed them to go to the corner of the street to watch for their father.

Tom in the meantime had finished his labor and had received his weekly wages from the foreman, who also gave him a sovereign (five dollars) as a Christmas gift from his employer. He slapped the money from one hand to the other and exclaimed, "£7 10s.1 Whew!" He then whistled with delight. Quickening his steps, he arrived at the public house where Tontine No. 1 was held. The landlord was upstairs and therefore he had to wait a few minutes. During this time he entered into conversation with several old acquaintances at the counter. There had been some warm handshaking, and "I wish you a merry Christmas" had gone from lip to lip. Presently the landlord appeared (and, seeing Tom, slowly counted out to him £2. 12s. Tom picked up the money, put it into his pocket and turned towards the door; but as he was leaving one of his friends called out: "I say, Tom, you are not going in that way, are you?" Tom turned and replied, "Why, you know I promised not to drink until Christmas, and I never break my word." "Oh yes," said his friend, "I know that very well, but this is Christmas eve, and tomorrow is Christmas Day, and besides, we have mouths!" "Well, well," replied Tom, "Christmas eve is Christmas, I suppose. What will you have?" His friends called for their favorite beverages, and Tom ordered a glass of 'eightpenny' (strong) ale. There was the usual health drinking and some more merry Christmasing, and then Tom