

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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A TALE OF THE LONG AGO.

A blustering, wintry night in the little settlement on the shores of Port Nicholson; the infant township had settled early to rest. It was during the 'fifties in last century. A lad of sixteen was creeping furtively along The Beach, keeping in the deep gloom and shadow, and doing his best to hide the package he carried. For he was breaking the law, and conveying liquor to the soldiers on guard at Government House.

Thorndon was reached at last. The sentry, who "winked the other eye," was passed, the guardroom entered, and the package handed over.

A drink was handed to Jack, and a cigar was given him. It was his first smoke, but Jack wanted to be as much a man as his soldier friends, and puffed away merrily. But soon nature rose in revolt, and Jack hurried away. Backward he retraced his steps by the sad sea waves, until he came to Clay Point. There outraged nature had her revenge, and Jack was violently sick. It was a very quiet, sad youth who crept up to bed so silently that night; but he was firmly resolved that his first smoke should be his last, and he kept this resolve. Jack was never known to smoke again. But he still supplied his soldier friends with the forbidden liquor, and was fast learning to take his share with them. It was only the good Providence of God which saved him from ruin.

Word was conveyed to the Governor; the secret source of supply discovered. Jack's father was sent for, and agreed to punish his son. In vain he

searched for Jack, who had disappeared. The wooded hills above the town were searched, away to the top of Tinakori, right out to far Karori, but the boy was not found.

In the meantime the soldiers had looked after Jack, and he lay snugly hidden aboard a small ketch off Barrett's Wharf. When the ketch crept out to sea Jack's father was not to be anxious, because his son had shipped as assistant cook on board the ketch, and was on his way to Lyttelton. Poor Jack, supplied liberally with ship's grog, was out of sight of home before he was conscious enough to know that he was one of the crew.

The weather was rough, and no sooner was the ketch clear of the Heads when she was buffeted wildly by the rollers in Cook Strait. For three days she struggled on, and then, by the force of the gale, was piled a wreck at the mouth of the Waimakiriri River. Jack was helped ashore by a sailor, quite sober now, and badly frightened. After many adventures, he got to Lyttelton and was lucky enough to run across a skipper a great friend of his father's.

"Hullo, Jack," said the skipper, "ready to go home?"

"Yes, sir, and when I get there I want to stay there. No more sea trips for me."

"Well, you can come with me. Your father asked me to keep a look-out for you."

"Is dad very cross?" asked Jack.

"He's not exactly pleased, Jack, but if you've learnt a lesson, you know he'll be only too glad to forgive you."

"I'm not doing that any more, sir."

"Quite right, my boy."

Jack's family were very glad to see him. His father took him to Government House, and after the Governor had listened to his story, and noted the true penitence of the lad, he freely forgave him.

"Take my advice, boy," said the Governor, "and keep away from the soldiers and their grog."

A few days later Jack sought out Mr Fraser, a leading Rechabite, in the little settlement.

"Mr Fraser," said Jack, "I want to become a Rechabite."

"What does your father say?"

"He's quite willing. Though not a strict teetotaler himself, he's quite willing I should be one. I've had enough of strong drink to last me all my life."

Mr Fraser had a quiet talk with the boy, and pointed out how many, even in their little colony, had been ruined by drink, and how wise it was to let it absolutely alone.

So Jack signed the temperance pledge, and later on joined the Rechabites. He was a worker and a leader among them for half a century, and the work he only lay down with his life.

In his latter years, when thousands in New Zealand were voting for the absolute prohibition of the liquor trade, Jack was heard to say: "When I first joined them, you could count the Prohibitionists in Wellington on the fingers of your two hands. So speedily has the movement grown even more speedily it will grow, until this licensed iniquity shall be swept from the fairest jewel of the Pacific."