

# THE BACK-SLIDER



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**WHEN I was graduated from high-school the World War was on in full blast. I was too young for the army but old enough to man a machine for the production of the means of wholesale destruction. I became a machine-hand at high wages. Machinery appealed to me anyway, because I had always wanted to be a mechanical engineer. Keen to learn as many different operations as possible, I insisted on being transferred from one operation to another until I had a good practical knowledge of all machines in a standard machine shop. With that equipment I was ready to travel for broader experience and in seven**

**years had worked in the leading industrial centers in the eastern states, supplementing my shop work with night classes in marine engineering.**

**I had the good times of the period but confined my drinking to weekends, with an occasional party after work in the evenings. But I was unsettled and dissatisfied, and in a sense disgusted with going from job to job and achieving nothing more than a weekly pay envelope. I wasn't particularly interested in making a lot of money, but I wanted to be comfortable and independent as soon as possible.**

**So I married at that time, and for a while it seemed that I had found the solution to my urge for moving around. Most people settle down when they marry and I thought I'd**

**have the same experience, that my wife and I would chose a place where we could establish a home and bring up a family. I had the dream of wearing carpet slippers in a life of comparative ease by the time I was forty. It didn't work out that way. After the newness of being married had worn off a little the old wander business got me again.**

**In 1924 I brought my wife to a growing city in the middle west where work was always plentiful. I had been in and out of it several times before and I could always get a job in the engineering department of its largest industrial plant. I early acquired the spirit of the organization which had a real reputation for constructive education of its workers. It encouraged ambition and aided latent talent 'to**

**develop. I was keen about my work and strove always to place myself in line for promotion. I had a thorough knowledge of the mechanical needs of the plant and when I was offered a job in the purchasing department's mechanical section I took it.**

**We were now resident in sort of a workers' paradise, a beautifully landscaped district where employees were encouraged to buy homes from the company. We had a boy about two years after I started with the company and with his advent I began to take marriage seriously. My boy was going to have the best I could give him. He would never have to work through the years as I had done. We had a very nice circle of acquaintance where we lived, nice neighbors and my colleagues in the engineering department and later in**

**purchasing were good people, many of them bent on getting ahead and enjoying the good things of life while they climbed. We had nice parties with very little drinking, just enough to give a little Saturday night glow to things-never enough to get beyond control.**

**Fateful and fatal came the month of October in the year 1929. Work slowed down. Reassuring statements from financial leaders maintained our confidence that industry would soon be on an even keel again. But the boat kept rocking. In our organization, as in many others, the purchasing department found its work lessened by executive order. Personnel was cut down. Those who were left went around working furiously at whatever there was to do, looking**

**furtively at each other wondering who would be next to go. I wondered if the long hours of overtime with no pay would be recognized in the cutting down program. I lay awake lots of nights just like any other man who sees what he has built up threatened with destruction.**

**I was laid off. I took it hard for I had been doing a good job and I thought as a man often will, that it might have been somebody else who should get the axe. Yet there was a sense of relief. It had happened. And partly through resentment and partly from a sense of freedom I went out and got pretty well intoxicated. I stayed drunk for three days, something very unusual for me, who had very seldom lost a day's work from drinking.**

**My experience soon helped me to a fairly important job in the engineering department of another company. My work took me out of town quite a bit, never at any great distance from home, but frequently overnight. Sometimes I wouldn't have to report at the office for a week, but I was always in touch by phone. In a way I was practically my own boss and being away from office discipline I was an easy victim to temptation. And temptation certainly existed. I had a wide acquaintance among the vendors to our company who liked me and were very friendly. At first I turned down the countless offers I had to take a drink, but it wasn't long before I was taking plenty.**

**I'd get back into town after a trip, pretty well organized from my day's**

**imbibing. It was only a step from this daily drinking to successive bouts with absence from my route. I would phone and my chief couldn't tell from my voice whether I had been drinking or not, but gradually learned of my escapades and warned me of the consequences to myself and my job.. Finally when my lapses impaired my efficiency and some pressure was brought to bear on the chief, he let me go. That was in 1932.**

**I found myself back exactly where I had started when I came to town. I was still a good mechanic and could always get a job as an hourly rated machine operator. This seemed to be the only thing which offered and once more I discarded the white collar for the overalls and canvas gloves. I had spent more than half a**



**dozen good years and had got exactly nowhere, so I did my first really serious drinking. I was good for at least ten days or two weeks off every two months I worked, getting drunk and then half-heartedly sobering up. This went on for almost three years. My wife did the best she could to help me at first, but eventually lost patience and gave up trying to do anything with me at all. I was thrown into one hospital after another, got sobered up, discharged, and ready for another bout. What money I had saved dwindled and I turned everything I had into cash to keep on drinking.**

**In one hospital, a Catholic Institution, one of the sisters had talked religion to me and had brought a priest in to see me. Both**

**were sorry for me and assured me that I would find relief in Mother Church. I wanted none of it. "If I couldn't stop drinking of my own free will, I was certainly not going to drag God into it," I thought.**

**During another hospital stay a minister whom I liked and respected came to see me. To me, he was just another non-alcoholic who was unable, even by the added benefit and authority of the cloth, to do anything for an alcoholic.**

**I sat down one day to figure things out. I was no good to myself, my wife, or my growing boy. My drinking had even affected him; he was a nervous, irritable child, getting along badly at school, making poor grades because the father he knew was a sot and an unpredictable one. My insurance was sufficient to take care**

**of my wife and child for a fresh start by themselves and I decided that I'd simply move out of the world for good. I took a killing dose of bichloride of mercury.**

**They rushed me to the hospital. The emergency physicians applied the immediate remedies but shook their heads. There wasn't a chance, they said. And for days it was touch and go. One day the chief resident physician came in on his daily rounds. He had often seen me there before for alcoholism.**

**Standing at my bedside he showed more than professional interest, tried to buoy me up with the desire to live. He asked me if I would really like to quit drinking and have another try at living. One clings to life no matter how miserable. I told him I would and that I would try**

**again. He said he was going to send another doctor to see me, to help me.**

**This doctor came and sat beside my bed. He tried to cheer me up about my future, pointed out I was still a young man with the world to lick and insisted that I could do it if I really wanted to stop drinking. Without telling me what it was, he said he had an answer to my problem and condition that really worked. Then he told me very simply the story of his own life, a life of generous tipping after professional hours for more than three decades until he had lost almost everything a man can lose, and how he had found and applied the remedy with complete success. He felt sure I could do the same. Day after day he called on me in the hospital and spent hours**

**talking to me.**

**He simply asked me to make a practical application of beliefs I already held theoretically but had forgotten all my life. I believed in a God who ruled the universe. The doctor submitted to me the idea of God as a father who would not willingly let any of his children perish and suggested that most, if not all of our troubles, come from being completely out of touch with the idea of God, with God Himself. All my life, he said, I had been doing things of' my own human will as opposed to God's will and that the only certain way for me to stop drinking was to submit my will to God and let Him handle my difficulties.**

**I had never looked on my situation in that way, had always felt myself**

**very remote indeed from a Supreme Being. "Doc," as I shall call him hereinafter, was pretty positive that God's law was the Law of Love and that all my resentful feelings which I had fed and cultivated with liquor were the result of either conscious or unconscious, it didn't matter which, disobedience to that law. Was I willing to submit my will? I said I would try to do so. While I was still at the hospital his visits were supplemented by visits from a young fellow who had been a heavy drinker for years but had run into "Doc" and had tried his remedy.**

**At that time, the ex-problem drinkers in this town, who have now grown to considerable proportions, numbered only Doc and two other fellows. To help themselves and compare notes they met once a week**

**in a private house and talked things over. As soon as I came from the hospital I went with them. The meeting was without formality. Taking love as the basic command I discovered that my faithful attempt to practice a law of love led me to clear myself of certain dishonesties.**

**I went back to my job. New men came and we were glad to visit them. I found that new friends helped me to keep straight and the sight of every new alcoholic in the hospital was a real object lesson to me. I could see in them myself as I had been, something I had never been able to picture before.**

**Now I come to the hard part of my story. It would be great to say I progressed to a point of splendid fulfillment, but it wouldn't be true. My later experience points a moral**

**derived from a hard and bitter lesson. I went along peacefully for two years after God had helped me quit drinking. And then something happened. I was enjoying the friendship of understanding fellows and getting along quite well in my work and in my small social circle. I had largely won back the respect of my former friends and the confidence of my employer. I was feeling fine-too fine. Gradually I began to take the plan I was trying to follow apart. After all, I asked myself, did I really have to follow any plan at all to stay sober? Here I was, dry for two years and getting along all right. It wouldn't hurt if I just carried on and missed a meeting or two. If not present in the flesh I'd be there in spirit, I said in excuse, for I felt a little bit guilty about staying away.**



**And I began to neglect my daily communication with God. Nothing happened-not immediately at any rate. Then came the thought that I could stand on my own feet now. When that thought came to mind-that God might have been all very well for the early days or months of my sobriety but I didn't need Him now-I was a gone coon. I got clear away from the life I had been attempting to lead. I was in real danger. It was just a step from that kind of thinking to the idea that my two years training in total abstinence was just what I needed to be able to handle a glass of beer. I began to taste. I became fatalistic about things and soon was drinking deliberately knowing I'd get drunk, stay drunk, and what would inevitably happen.**

**My friends came to my aid. They tried to help me, but I didn't want help. I was ashamed and preferred not to see them come around. And they knew that as long as I didn't want to quit, as long as I preferred my own will instead of God's will, the remedy simply could not be applied. It is a striking thought that God never forces anyone to do His will, that His help is ever available but has to be sought in all earnestness and humility.**

**This condition lasted for months, during which time I had voluntarily entered a private institution to get straightened out. On the last occasion when I came out of the fog, I asked God to help me again. Shamefaced as I was, I went back to the fellowship. They made me welcome, offered me collectively and**

**individually all the help I might need. They treated me as though nothing had happened. And I feel that it is the most telling tribute to the efficacy of this remedy that during my period of relapse I still knew this remedy would work with me if I would let it, but I was too stubborn to admit it.**

**That was long ago. Depend upon it I stay mighty close to what has proven to be good for me. I don't dare risk getting very far away. And I have found that in simple faith I get results by placing my life in God's hands every day, by asking Him to keep me a sober man for 24 hours, and trying to do His will. He has never let me down yet.**

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