

## Chapter X

### THE CURSE OF DRINKING



My life was no doubt influenced by a Mr. Bradley whom I met while working on the flume. He was an educated man and a professional musician. He played the violin and had had an orchestra of his own at one time but he let John Barleycorn rob him of everything he had. He worked on the flume long enough to buy another violin. He talked me into buying one too and taught me how to play some. I never got to be a Jack Benny but I got so I could play good enough to entertain myself. Like all drinkers I ever knew, Mr. Bradley said he had quit drinking for good and was going to make something out of himself again. He stuck with it for about six months. Then one day he went to Redding and that was the last we ever saw of him. Father saw him in town about two weeks after he left and he was still drunk.

Two other men that worked on the flume and had some influence on me were Cap and Will Wilsey. They were cousins - sons of Dick Wilsey and their mother was the woman that used a red light to light her house. Will played the violin and Cap accompanied him on the guitar. I went to Redding with them several times. In the evening they would play in different saloons on California Street. Sometimes some of the men would toss them a little money but in most places the bartender would give them whatever they wanted to drink after they had played twenty minutes or a half hour. I was always offered a drink but I would never drink with them. Maybe it was no honor to me not to drink for I never liked the stuff.

I think there were other reasons that I didn't learn to drink though. I don't know how Mother did it, but in some way she instilled in us a desire to live a good clean life and make something of ourselves. Maybe it was because of her own good life she lived before us. I know, because of Mother's life, I thought that all women were good except a few that lived in red light houses. I was in my teens when women were fighting to get to vote - I thought if they ever did - we would have heaven on earth. It was a sad awakening to me when I got out in the world and learned that women were no better than men.

Maybe Granny also had some part in shaping my life - anyway when I met up with the kind of men I worked with on the flume. The good ones made me want to be like them, and the other kind were disgusting and made me want to be unlike them. Also, ever since I was just a few years old I could

see that when men drank, they had nothing and the few I knew who didn't drink had good jobs, good homes, good clothes and the other things I knew I wanted.

Uncle Charlie, Jim and Doc were three men that also made me disgusted with men who drank. They very seldom went any place that they didn't come home drunk. They ran cattle and even if they went riding after the cattle they quite often ended up at the Calkin's place. Mr. Calkins had a large vineyard and made wine and sold it. When the uncles went there, they nearly always came home drunk. One night after dark Old Blue-dog, Uncle Charlie's horse came home without him. Mother told Bill and me to take his horse and go down the road and see if we could find him. We took a lantern so we could see and both got on the horse and started down the road. When we came to the first gate, about a mile and a half from home, there was Uncle Charlie lying on the ground sound asleep. He had gotten off the horse to open the gate and was so drunk he couldn't get back on again. We tried to get him on the horse and couldn't. I wanted to take the rope off the saddle and put it around him and drag him home but Bill said we couldn't do that because it would skin him up. So we had to go home and hitch old Dolly to the buckboard and go after him. We managed to roll him into the back of the buckboard and get him home and into bed.

Another time he came home with the two horse team and wagon loaded with hay. There was a narrow place in the road right along the creek. He pulled the team out so near the edge of the road that if he had gotten over six inches farther, the team, wagon, and all would have gone over the bank and dropped twenty feet into the creek. The wagon track stayed there for months to remind him how near he came to killing himself. But that didn't stop him from drinking.

When any of the uncles came home drunk - they were always going to give me a cow or buy me a horse and saddle, but when they would sober up they always forgot about their promises. I don't remember of them ever giving a red cent's worth of anything to any of us kids, so you can see why I never liked people who spent their money drinking.

I think this was about the time in my life that I decided that if I lived to be a hundred years old, I would never let anything go down my throat that would make a big a fool of me as a lot of men I had seen at that time had made of themselves.