

THE RED, RED WINE:

A TEMPERANCE STORY.

THE REV. J. JACKSON WRAY'S LAST STORY.

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CHAPTER VIII.

While the selected few in Netherborough were dining and drinking, neither wisely nor well, the lower orders—how much lower?—were equally busy, according to their limits, on Netherborough Green. The bountiful supply of roast beef and bread was disposed of rapidly, and several bulky barrels of strong beer were soon exhausted of their contents.

For awhile all went on peaceably and pleasantly. Those who knew when they had had enough or thought they did, strolled off for a walk in the green lanes; or gathered in knots at the street corners, to discuss the new railway in general, and the events of the day in particular.

The worthy vicar, thoughtful man, appealed to the men who had charge of the ale-barrels, not to serve out the liquor to boys and girls, but as the custodians themselves were soon too merry to be wise, the well-meant check was of small value.

In the course of the evening, contingents of farm lads and lasses, farmers' sons, and others from the neighboring villages, joined the roysterers on the Green. At length, the scene that the rising moon looked down upon might well have led her to 'fill the horn' no more, for that process as carried on by the mundane fools upon the Green was an uttermost scandal and disgrace. The stage of mild and good-tempered elevation was soon passed; that of boisterous hilarity and rough-and-tumble horseplay succeeded. Passionate quarrels, reckless mischief, and the mad pranks of drunken license followed.

An epoch in the history of Netherborough! The outcome of that now long-distant day was mourning and misery and shame which not only left their mark behind them, but are themselves in evidence at Netherborough at this day.

And yet at this day, the banquet and the beer; the 'red, red wine,' the barrel on the tap, are the Englishman's established and favorite method of paying honors to a hero, or of celebrating some great deed or day; and drinking healths and proposing 'toasts' is still a fashionable foolery! The devil's game is being played within more decent limits, it is true, but for that result we have to thank the steady and heroic perseverance of the patriots, who, like Walter Bardsley, have borne the Temperance Banner into the heart of the enemy's camp.

When Aaron Brigham reached his own little rose-embowered cottage on the Spaldon Road, he found his supper, a basin of boiled milk and bread, awaiting him.

Esther Harland was anxiously awaiting him, for not only was the milk cooling fast, but the hurly-burly in the town made her apprehensive that Aaron's non-appearance at his usual time was because some harm had befallen him.

'O, Aaron,' she said, 'wherever ha' yo' been? Your bread an' milk's been waitin' for you, I don't know hoo long; and warm milk that's well-nigh cold is a'most as tasteless as warm water. Bless me! hoo wet you are! Is the dew fallin'? Why, your hair's as wet as a dish-cloth. Let me put it in t' oven for you.'

'Bless the woman!' replied Aaron, with a smile and a twinkle; 'what for? You'll ha' to put my head in with it. I'd do a'most anything to oblige yo', Hetty, but I must draw the line somewhere—'

'Ho'd your noise, you dear owd silly. I meant yer bread an' milk, not yer hair,' said Esther, with a laugh, which showed that the air was clear again. 'I was frightened that something had happened to yo'.'

'Something would ha' happened to me if you'd got my hair an' what it grows upon into the oven—'

Hereupon Esther took his hat and stick out of his hand, patted his bald crown in mock

punishment, and placed his milk before him, laughing heartily, as she answered:

'Nay! I'm ower glad to see yo' safe an' sound, to put yo' anywhere but in your owd armchair. Noo then, put your supper inside you, an' tell us what you've seen an' heard.'

On Aaron's face a shadow fell. Before the spoon had reached his lips it was lowered again.

'Esther, my gell, I've sen a feyther run away from his own bairn, and I've heard a bairn cryin' its sweet little heart oot wi' a grief that'll kill her some o' these days.' The old man's voice faltered, and tears that do not readily come to the eyes of age trickled down his cheeks.

'Esther,' he continued, 'I wish you would go an' see lanue Kitty Smart. I don't expect her feyther'll go nigh her to-night. He's dead drunk i' Smith's coach-house. I got Jack Kelby an' another to carry him there, an' there he'll stay, I expect, till mornin'.'

'What made yo' meddle wi' him?' said Esther, sharply. 'He's nowt no better than a hog. Let him lie where he tum'les. He isn't worth lifting up.' Aaron said nothing, but he sighed heavily.

'What's that for?' quoth Esther, who had a very tender regard for the old man for all her occasional asperities.

'I'se thinkin', Hetty. What would ha' become o' me, if I'd been left to lie where I fell?'

'You? Don't talk such nonsense. You never tum'led so low as that, an'—'

'Mebbe not; but who kept me from it, Hetty? I was no mair worth liftin' up than any other sinner.'

'Twas mercy all, immense an' free,
An' O my God, it foond oot Me.'

'Hetty! I'm boond to meddle wi' Tom Smart for the sake o' three folk—three different folks,' continued Aaron, speaking with low emphasis.

'Who's them?' said Esther, curiously, but not grammatically.

'Why, for the sake o' my dear lahtle Kitty, my sweetheart; bless her! I love the little lassie mair than I can tell yo', an' for her sake I'll do my best to save Tom Smart.'

'An' who else's?' said Esther again, with a grudge against Lindley Murray.

'For the sake o' my Lord an' Maister, Jesus Christ,' said Aaron, reverently. 'He came to lift us all up, low as we had tum'led. He spent His life i' liftin' the vilest an' the worst, an' he lifted up a prayin' thief as he was dyin', an' took him with Him—up yonder—where I'm expecting to go when He chooses to lift me up.'

The old man bowed his white head in silence. Esther Harland, good soul, knew she sat in the presence of one who did not need to be lifted much higher to reach the throne. Almost mechanically she asked, 'And for whose sake besides?'

'For my own!' said the old man, suddenly raising his head to look—not Esther only—but the whole world in the face; 'I'll neither be a traitor to Jesus, nor a murderer o' my brother, nor will I put i' peril my own immortal soul. So long as I can call Him my Redeemer, I'll try to redeem somebody. So long as the Hand that bears the nail-prints reaches doon to lift me, this hand o' mivs shall reach doon to lift my fallen neighbor, an' if—here he paused, and looked upon the hard and horny palm, and on the fingers crooked with years of toil—if it be needful that the nails should be driven here before I om can be lifted, I'm riddy!'

Leaving the old man to himself, Esther Harland made haste to Smart's cottage to see if she could make matters lighter for little Kitty and the children. If she had met with Tom Smart lying in the street, aye, or in the

ditch, I think she would have lifted him up for somebody's sake.

A few days after that great day of the feast, the scholars, teachers, and friends of the Sunday School connected with Zion Chapel, had their annual feast. Tea and cake were provided, and all those delicacies which make public teas in the East Riding so famous, and in a field on the Spaldon road the happy party held high holiday. A light and balmy breeze that drove the clouds along served only to make the weather more delightful, and, as Aaron Brigham said, with a heart as young as the merry youngsters in their play, it was as if the day had been 'made o' purpose,' as indeed it was to such a child-like faith in Providence as his.

Among those who presided at the feast itself none looked fairer, none put on a more genuine guise, none were more popular with the young folks, than Jennie Bardsley. She seemed to be the life and soul of the whole proceedings. Her very presence was regarded as the guarantee of a happy and successful day. The bevy of girls who formed her own Bible-class half worshipped their teacher, and vied with teach other as to which should be her most effective helper in attending to the wants and supplying the amusements of the smaller children, whose appetites for both seemed to be in inverse ratio to their size.

She was seen at her best, perhaps, when surrounded by her youthful companions; a girl among girls, and yet a teacher to be looked up to, and to be loved. Her summer-hued, small-patterned, and simple 'print' dress, set off her tall form to perfection, and the broad-brimmed summer hat that partially hid her wealth of brown hair, and veiled her dark eyes from the sunlight, gave her an added attraction; and there were many in the gala-field that day who doubted whether 'the handsome Vet,' handsome as he was, and popular, deserved to be the owner of so fair a prize.

The fair and merry Jennie had a joke for everybody, and her genial manners and ready speech gave quite a cheery cue that everybody seemed impelled to follow. When the tea was over, who but she must organize the games, deal out the skipping ropes, the hoops, the battle-dores and shuttlecocks, or bind the eyes of those who groped, amid shouts and laughter, in blind man's buff. And she was equal to the occasion. There were those present, however, who thought, and thought rightly, that she was exercising great self-repression. At times, when she was taken un-awares, there stole over her pleasant face an anxious look, a look of pain, and at times of positive fear, as if she were under the influence of some sad foreboding, and tremblingly asked, 'What next?'

The worthy pastor of Zion Chapel, Mr. Dunwell, an observant man, had seen this so often in the course of the afternoon, that he felt impelled, with kind intent, as a pastor might well do, to speak to her on the subject.

'Miss Bardsley,' he said, in a low and sympathetic tone when no one was near, 'I'm afraid you carry a heartache to-day, under all your pleasant seeming. Can a true friend help you to bear it?'

Jennie raised her eyes, which were at once filled with tears, and instantly replied.

'You are right, Mr. Dunwell. Thank you for your thought of me. To tell the truth, I'm sad and miserable on account of—'

Here she paused suddenly, and looked in the pastor's face.

A veil seemed to fall over her tearful eyes, giving a certain expression of distrust—no, not exactly that, say, rather of reserve, to her bonnie face, 'Forgive me,' she said in a voice that had a mournful cadence in it, 'I'd rather not tell you. Still I thank you.'

Here was a swarm of little ones out of the infant class gathered round her skirts, and