

THE RED, RED WINE:

A TEMPERANCE STORY.

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

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(CHAPTER XXXI.—Continued.)

He suggested to a handful of his comrades, in the parlor of the 'Griffin,' that they should join to 'stand treat' to the navvies of Netherborough; giving them plentiful rounds of beer to drink the health of Walter Bardsley and his bride. The invitation was given to the men as they came out of the contractor's Sunday meeting held in the plank building, by sending messages to the various 'gangers,' and in every other way that was likely to insure a general response.

A little way out of Netherborough, and near the works of the new railway, there was a low beer-shop called 'The Navvies' Delight.'

A special license had been applied for, 'for the convenience of the men,' and two or three squires, and one or two brewers, and one or two clergymen, acting as Justices of the Peace, did hereby initiate a course of disorder, quarrel, and open vice to which Netherborough, bad as it was, had hitherto been a stranger. After church hours—O, the piety of the liquor laws!—the Sunday evenings were now doubly desecrated by the drunken revels that shamed the Sabbath in and around 'The Navvies' Delight.'

One Sunday evening a rowdy gang of navvies, supplied with strong ale by Dick Bardsley and his confederates, reeled out from 'The Navvies' Delight,' and met the congregation which was just leaving the service at the Mission-room. The retiring worshippers were greeted with shouts of laughter and insulting jeers. Some of them, not remarkable for their self-control, were not slow in making reprisals. Stones were thrown, blows were given; hooting and hustling fanned the fury of the fray, and led to a riot of menacing dimensions.

In vain did Mr. Allamore and his colleagues strive to allay the storm. He was fain to drag Jennie Bardsley out of the throng. The passions of the drink-excited navvies became murderous; and one gigantic fellow, named Asplin, distinguished himself by his reckless brutality. He had had a quarrel with a young carpenter, a quarrel of old standing; and he seemed to pick him out for special fight. The big barrow-man, half crazed with beer, had knocked down and brutally kicked a lad who crossed his way. The young carpenter, roused to indignant fury, struck the fellow a stinging blow in the face. In another moment the navvy dashed forward with an awful oath; the flash of a long knife-blade was seen in the twilight, a cry and a groan overtopped all sounds. A quivering human frame lay face upward on the highway, and the soil around was red with blood!

'Murder!' The cry was a shriek, keen and dreadful. It would not die out, it held on, an undying echo, and made the twilight tremble. It arose from the lips of the young wife, now the stricken widow, of the murdered man. They had sat together at the mission-service, had sung together the praises of the Lord of the Sabbath. They were together now, he, stark dead upon the ground, with his white face turned up to the darkening heavens; she, lying heart-broken across his body, with no words upon her wan, white lips. How do I know this? I saw the stare of the dead man as he was carried home. I was young then: I can see it now.

The drunken navvy, Richard Asplin, who had done his comrade to death by the knife, was arrested, and in due time was taken before the magistrates—the magistrates to whom Netherborough was indebted for that ennobling and beneficent institution, 'The Navvies' Delight!' The Clergyman, J.P., the

Brewer, J.P., the Squire, J.P., who had shares in the brewery, committed the manslaughter to York Castle for trial at the next assizes, and each one of them used some strong language, for the behoof of the general public, on the 'Growing use of the knife,' and said no single word against the use of the drink that made the owner of the knife a murderer!

The coroner's inquest was held, of course, at the 'Netherborough Arms,' for alike the fount and stream of the British law and justice, so far as crime is concerned, smells of alcohol all the way and all the time; and Mr. Richard Bardsley, that 'citizen of credit and renown,' was foreman of the jury, surely a fitting leader of the twelve good men and true!

Such evidence was adduced of malice, in the shape of previous threats, and at least one assault, that the jury brought in a verdict of wilful murder, and for that crime, and more, perhaps, because of the common 'use of the knife' that disgraced that period, Richard Asplin was tried for his life, found guilty, and sentenced to death.

There are those living to-day, I dare say, who heard the learned judge's summing-up, and who remember with what power and pathos his lordship spoke of the ruinous consequences of alcoholic indulgence.

'If it were not for this fell destroyer,' he said, 'this foe to life and morals, this enemy to health and thrift and order, this all-inclusive maker of crimes, our vocation would be gone, and pauperism, crime, madness, and misery would largely vanish from the land.'

My lords and Mr. Justices! A plain word in your ears, if you please. You had surely better restrain your virtuous indignation, and cut short your hypocritical diatribes against Drink, or stop your personal patronage of the fiend of the vat and still, or you must be content to hear the contemptuous comment which Goldsmith has made classical—Fudge!

In those days, the scaffold was openly reared in sight of all the people, for the education of a beery and brutal mob. On the morning of the execution, poor Asplin, apparently penitent, and certainly sober, made a little speech, after the custom of the times, and hoped 'that all you good people will take warning of my misfortune, and give up the drink that has brought me here.'

You see his testimony was much the same in meaning as that of my lord the judge, and was probably of equal or a little superior value. In all likelihood if Richard Asplin could have been reprieved from the scaffold he would have repaired, as soon as convenient, to the 'Navvies' Delight,' or to some other beer-shop, to celebrate his escape in the fashion provided and protected by British law!

That, of course, could not be. Those in authority had far too much virtuous regard for the lives of honest citizens, so they swung the life out of him, broke the neck of him, and buried him in ground accursed within the precincts of the gaol. Then when 'justice' had been done, they were content to let the demon who had prompted him to murder, run amuck through all the land, licensed to breed and train a succession of Richard Asplins to keep the gallows busy, and the gaols supplied.

It may seem to the reader that the episode of Richard Asplin has but little to do with the story, but let them remember that Walter Bardsley's ill-starred lapse on his wedding-day was answerable for his brother Dick's resolve to 'stand treat' to the navvies, and to be even with Mr. Allamore. The diversified action and results of alcohol are infinitely

numerous, but the trail of the serpent is over them all, and much of it is blood-red! Very!

CHAPTER XXXII.

There was great rejoicing in the cottage of Tom Smart. That reformed drunkard had now held on his way on the lines of self-control so long and steadily that those who 'had hopes of him' were getting quite sanguine, and even those who shook their wise heads the most, and most persistently prophesied the worst, were beginning to be silenced. The ever kind and genial Mr. Norwood Hayes was greatly interested in Tom's case, and his inquiries concerning him were both numerous and sympathetic.

'Well, Aaron,' he asked one evening, as the old man was bound for Tom's poor, but vastly improved home, 'how's your protege, Tom Smart, getting on?'

'Why, wonderfully weel, I think. I reckon it's the hardest battle that he's iver had to fight, and the way he's winnin' it and howding his own is capital, fair capital; that's what it is. As you say, he's a prodigy, for iverybody's surpris'd at him.'

Mr. Hayes smiled good-humoredly. 'Well,' he said, 'I'm sure we're all immensely glad for himself, and deeply grateful to God for the change that has come to him. I do hope it will continue.'

'I think it will,' said the old man. 'There's a few on us that's prayin' for him, an', as far as we can, that's givin' t' poor fellow a helpin' hand.'

'Yes, I'm praying for him, too,' said Mr. Hayes, not at all willing to be left out of the 'few' who were Tom's active friends. 'But how about giving him a helping hand? It is he for himself in this case, you know. You can't abstain for him, can you?'

'O yes, you can,' said Aaron, with an emphatic nod. "'I won't drink while you don't drink,'" said Aaron, "'for love's sake," heez kept two folks sober a life-tahme, an' thoo-sands o' poor weak brothers is findin' t' strength in it ivery day!'

'There's limits to oor ability to help 'em, nae doot,' the old man continued; 'but as I've said, we can go withoot drink ourselves, an' we can give 'em a cheerin' word. It's nae use sayin' "Doon't thoo drink, Tom Smart; it's at thee peril if thoo does. I takes a little drop myself, an' I knoa that its varry good and pleasant, but thoo musn't touch it." Mr. Hayes, I shoold be doonright 'sham'd o' myself to talk like that. Tom's likely to do as I do when he won't do what I say, an' so doin' and sayin' shall keep company. When t' followers o' Christ follow that plan, I think they'll follow Him "fully," as the Bible says. As it is,' said Aaron, looking the deacon squarely in the face, 'a good mony o' 'em isn't within sight of Him, an' I doot he won't knoa 'em when they want to scrape closer acquaintance with Him an' find t' door shut.'

Here, for more reasons than one, the conversation ended.

(To be Continued.)

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