

THE RED, RED WINE:

A TEMPERANCE STORY.

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

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CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

'That's true,' said Mr. Norwood Hayes, who, as I have already said, was far too finely tuned to truth and right not to endorse the telling sentence, though it did discomfit his own position. 'That's true,' he said. 'I'm with you there with all my heart, but it won't do as a substitute for grace divine.'

'Nobody wants it to,' said Mr. Allamore, who was often a little impatient under orthodox platitudes presented in conventional forms. 'I'm content that God shall have the sole handling of His own grace, and am certain that He does not intend that it shall relieve me one iota from the right use of mine to my brother man. I will not allow you to shirk your own responsibilities as a brother of men—none the less if they are weak brothers—by relegating them to the "grace of God." If every man were an isolated unit, then each would be utterly dependent on the—I will not use the sorely abused and hackneyed phrase any more;—and I'm bound to say it would be a mighty poor world; that's my opinion.'

'In the main, I heartily agree with you, Mr. Allamore, and, indeed, you shall find me a willing helper in any plan for the moral and social elevation of your employees—'

'Nay, nay, don't let us leave the point in hand,' said Mr. Allamore, with a conciliatory smile on his earnest face. 'We are dealing just now with the matter of a Christian's personal responsibility in the matter of strong drink. It seems to me that God's plan is to help man, save man, lift man, gladden man by man; and if the kindly "grace" of a man like you can stoop to do and to be what a weaker and worse man ought to do and be, then your stoop shall be his staff, and he shall find your high level by reason of the moral "lift" you let down to reach his low one. It is of little use standing on the hill-top and telling the lame man at the bottom to come up where you are. You must go down into the valley, Mr. Hayes, and help him up!'

Mr. Norwood Hayes was silenced, if not convinced. No doubt he could have found material for effective reply, for he was clever at debate and a master at 'fence;' but he was good and true, and as he saw the contractor's beneficent soul gleaming through his eyes, and his sympathetic enthusiasm of (and for) humanity vibrating in his voice, he had not the heart to do other than coincide.

Mr. Norwood Hayes was not convinced. Still, that gentleman was provided with much food for thought, strong food, too, as he turned his steps homeward. That sentence of Mr. Allamore's, about the 'grace of man,' was not to be easily dismissed as a mere truism. He could truthfully say that he was not destitute of the attribute in question. There were few men in Netherborough who had a kindlier heart. His practical charities were numerous and unostentatious, and his labors in what the churches call 'work for the Lord,' was full of self-sacrifice and cheerful self-devotion.

But this particular development of the grace of man, this giving up even of his own religious excellencies, this dimming of his own light as a moral beacon—this was new to him, and he was not prepared to fall in with it.

CHAPTER XXI.

Having arrived at this most pleasant and comfortable conclusion, he arrived also at his most pleasant and comfortable home.

Mr. Hayes found his handsome laddie, Cuthbert, retailing some pleasant story to his sister, Alice. That light-hearted maiden was so interested in the narration that she broke ever and anon into merry laughter as it proceeded; and even from Mr. Hayes' thin

lips came a few feeble ripples, which were a great advance on her usually languid smile.

'Well, what's in the wind now?' said Mr. Hayes.

'Nay, there's nothing in the wind that I know of,' said Bertie, 'but there certainly has been something in the water. Those two queer old cronies, George Caffer and Phil Lambert, had a funny experience last night, and I happened to be there to see.'

'I suppose that the two comrades had spent the evening at the "Black Swan," the old toppers, as they have been in the habit of doing for many and many a day, and had taken too much drink on board, which is their bad old habit, too.'

'When they left the "Swan," they were quite hilarious. It was a splendid night. The moon was almost at the full. They didn't feel like going home till morning, and resolved to take a walk instead. They took the field-path towards Godlington, and after long, arduous, and devious efforts, they reached the border of the mill-dam, which was full of water, flowing smoothly and brightly beneath the smiling moon.'

'I had been to Godlington,' continued Cuthbert, 'and on my return I saw our two valiant boon-companions staggering, arm in arm, along the bank of the mill-stream. Suddenly Phil Lambert stopped, leaned his arm heavily on that of his comrade, and pointing to the sheeny water, he said, speaking thickly—'

'"I say, Geordie, my boy, let's walk there. It's a nice an' smooth bit o' foot-road that, ain't it?"'

'"No-non-sense, man," said Geordie, who always stammered when he was in his cups (and n'cupps). "Thoo mawn't walk there; it isn't seeafe."

'Geordie himself was too far gone to explain further, but he did his best to pull Caffer in the opposite direction.'

'"Seafe? it's as seeafe as the Bank of England," said Lambert. "An' hoo smooth an' clean it is! Come on wi' tha'."

In vain Geordie resisted. Caffer was strong and rotund, a real heavy-weight, consisting mainly, however, of the sodden obesity built up by beer. Lambert was thin and short, and would have been dapper if drink had not made him a semi-animated scarecrow instead. Hence he was at the mercy of his comrade in a struggle of this kind. What could he do? A bright thought flashed across his brain.

'"Lo-lo-ok here, Phil!" said he, in well-feigned alarm, and speaking in mock-solemn tones. "Ah tell tha' it's as mitch as thy life's worth to gan on that sacred caus'y. It's the Duke of Debenham's private walk!"'

'Now we all know Phil's a Radical; and Geordie's well-meant device to keep his friend on solid ground failed utterly.'

'"Blow the Duke o' Debenham!" shouted the pot-valiant Phil. "Ah'se as good a man as he is, ony day," and gripping Caffer by the arms, he stepped recklessly on the forbidden path, dragging his comrade in with him. In a moment they were splashing and floundering knee deep in mud, and more than waist-deep in water.'

'My first impulse was to laugh loud and long; but I found the drunken simpletons were more helpless than children, and in their vague efforts to sprawl to the bank again they fell, face forward, into the pool. Constable Harley had been watching them as well as I, and he and I together fished them out at once. Had we not been at hand, I don't believe that either of them could have saved himself; and certainly neither could have saved his friend. Their queer baptism had a wonderingly sobering effect on them, however, for they silently linked arms together, and made tracks for home, dank and dripping like a couple of scarecrows after a three days' rain!'

The close of Cuthbert's 'funny' story was greeted with a quartette of laughter, Cuthbert himself joining heartily with the listeners three.

Yes, Mrs. Hayes laughed in her washed-out way, and declared that the picture was 'too absurd,' and yet she herself had, more than once or twice, been the occasion of kitchen stories that had set the servants' table in a roar.

Even Mr. Hayes laughed—laughed like a schoolboy—and yet he had a wonderful reverence for 'manliness' and the 'nobility of man.' And Alice laughed, and Cuthbert laughed! Two sane men had been robbed of their reason; had all-but choked their lives out; and the laughter was loud and long!

At length, Mr. Hayes grew serious enough to extract his 'moral' from Cuthbert's well-told story. The smile upon his face was followed by an expression of strong disgust, mingled with a measure of contempt. Then he delivered himself thus—

'Cuthbert, my son, Mr. Allamore thinks that one ought to stoop to the level of a couple of drunken fools like these in the hope that we may raise them to our own! The way these teetotal cranks go on, insulting one's common sense, is wonderful.'

CHAPTER XXII.

My little heroine, Kitty Smart, had been having a comparatively good time of it lately. Her poor drink-sodden father had not only stayed away from the public house, but he had spent his days at home when he had no work to do, giving willing help to the overburdened little housekeeper; and had come home straight from his daily labor when he happened to meet with a job.

Hitherto, this state of things had not troubled him much. He had woken up to the fact that his children were in rags, and were half-starved, and he was both ashamed and sad at heart.

One day, after he had walked many a weary mile in quest of work, and had been repulsed wherever he had applied, Tommy Smart came home tired and worn, utterly dispirited and out of heart.

'Kitty, my lass,' said he, as he sank into the broken chair, which was once a seat of comfort, and now scarce a seat at all, 'it's all up wi' ma. Ah've lost my chance, an' t' work'us is the only spot fo' ma 'to put me heead in. Naebody 'll ha' ma. Ah wadn't mind, if it wasn't fo' thoo an' t' bairns. Ah cud dee willin' aneef. I ha' nae right to live, —but to see thoo pinin' away.'

Tom Smart could say no more. He cried outright, and his tears, unlike many maudlin torrents he had shed in his cups, were the tears of honest feeling and bitter remorse.

'Gran'feyther says that God'll never let me want for bread, 'cause I asks Him an' trusts Him ivery day. An' I've been thinkin' that He'll never let you want bread neather; 'cos, don't you see, you shall alus hev t' biggest bit o' mahne; an' you're axin' Him an' trustin' noo, aren't yo, Daddy?'

'I is, Kitty. I is,' said her father. 'I isn't worth it, but—'

'Yis, you are,' said Kitty, stopping that kind of heresy, with a kiss placed right upon the spot out of which it came, 'cos I is, an' I's only a lahle 'un.'

Kitty had hardly given utterance to this remarkable piece of logic when that young lady's 'true love' appeared upon the scene. Aaron Brigham as a sweetheart was most attentive and assiduous.

I am not quite sure that good Esther Harland was not inclined to be a little jealous of the little fairy in the Sou'gate cottage. At any rate, the number and the constancy of her master's visits were the subject of many a strong remark.

(To be continued.)