

BOYS AND GIRLS

THE RED, RED WINE:

A TEMPERANCE STORY.

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

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(CHAPTER XI.—Continued.)

"That's it, that's it, exactly," said he, "set a good example of strength and self-command, and don't be everlastingly pressing a man. It is foolish at the best, and with weak-minded men it is absolutely criminal. I declare, I get quite vexed with people. "Now do take a little more, Mr. A." "Let me fill up your glass, Mr. B." "You've had such a little drop, Mr. C." And Mr. Hayes could not have been more emphatic if he had been Father Mathew, Neal Dow, and J. B. Gough rolled into one. "However," he continued, with a sigh of relief, "let's change the subject. Have another cigar, Dunwell? What'll you have to drink with it? Try a glass of sherry?"

"No, thank you, I don't think it's a good plan to change your liquor."

"Oh! all right! No compulsion at my house. There's the whiskey by you, help yourself. And the worthy pastor did as he was told."

Walter Bardsley looked on, and his brow contracted as though he thought the minister was doing wrong. The wonder is that he did not frown at Norwood Hayes, but then, it must be remembered that Mr. Norwood Hayes was the subject of Walter Bardsley's hero-worship, and he regarded him as a veritable Bayard, a knight without fear and without reproach.

"By the way, what's this I hear about Huddleston the Great?" said Mr. Dunwell, sipping from his glass, and sending the curling smoke aloft by way of introduction to the new theme.

And the bruised and battered body of their comrade in many a 'social' lay stark and cold in its grave beneath the elm-tree; white on the sofa in her shadowed chamber lies the form of Jennie Bardsley. Her white face is turned to the wall, as she sighs and whispers the name of Reuben, and finds no tears to ease her aching heart.

No wonder that Walter Bardsley, despite his reverence for the father of his Alice, was glad to ask permission to retire.

As he walked homeward through the quiet streets, he overtook old Aaron Wingham.

"Hallo! Aaron," said he, "it's not usual to see you parading the streets of Netherborough at this time of night."

"No," said the old man, "I don't much matter it now that m' poor old eyes fail me, ah've been t' see Tom Smart."

"What's the matter with him?" said Walter. "Is he ill?"

"Ill! Aye, marry! John Barleycorn's broken his head for him, and mauled him considerably, and his bairns are half-starved, thanks to'd tonning o' t' fust sod."

"Aye me! I'm sorry to hear that, Aaron. I thought he was keeping straight too, now, but the turning of that first sod will have more to answer for than poor Tom Smart."

"Well, mebbe t' tonning o' t' sod wasn't so much t' blame as t' tonning o' the beer-barrel taps and them as does it; may God forgive 'em."

"Right you are, Aaron, I much doubt that had it not been for that unucky business, poor Reuben Stanford would have been a living man this day. And there at Mr. Hayes they have just been saying that he was "nobody's enemy but his own."

"What!" said Aaron, "and what sort of a friend then, has he been to Jennie Bardsley, God bless her?"

"Not much of a one for a certainty. One thing is certain, Aaron, we must do our best to beat the drink, or it will half empty Netherborough."

"Ah say, Mr. Walter, give us yer hand." He laid it in the hard rough palm of the old man.

Aaron took off his hat, and standing with his white head uncovered, he said:

"There's nobbut a few of us in Nether-

borough to fight the drink devil, Walter Bardsley, will you stand fast?"

"Aye, that I will."
"God bless thee, m' lad, and trust to Him, and not to Norwood Hayes."

CHAPTER XII.

Aaron's words concerning the mischief that had befallen Tommy Smart were by no means metaphorical. There is a well-known saying to the effect that a special Providence takes charge of children and drunkards. As regards the children, I believe it with all my heart, but as to the drunkards—well, there is a Providence, and a special one for that matter, that looks after all men—we should be in parlous straits were it not so, but for all that the saying is to all intents and purposes an unadulterated lie, coined by the same hand that says, 'It will do you good,' and for the self-same purpose. I suppose it is intended to give courage to those who, having drunk more than heads can stand, are persuaded to take 'just another,' because it will be all right anyhow. The only providence there is in the whole business is contained in the liquor itself, a sort of anaesthetic which for the time being deadens a man's consciousness of pain, and hides from him the loss of his manhood, but both the sense of pain and the sense of loss come back with redoubled force as the aching brain yields once more to the sway of reason.

This lying providence, born of the devil, had done but badly by Tommy Smart, and for many weeks after the pandemonium on Netherborough Green, he was confined a close prisoner in his own home, if so high a title can be rightly given to the squalid and miserable quarters in which he lay. Tommy was a man of very extravagant tastes in one direction—that of the 'Red Cow,' and as this indulgence cost him the greater part of what he earned, and at the same time altogether precluded the possibility of his getting more, it can hardly be expected that his dwelling should be other than it was, beggarly and bare, a type and pattern of the holes and hovels in which the worshippers of the drink-god live—and die.

There was no furniture in it, for the ghosts of broken chairs, the scraggy remnant of a table, the heaps of rags and shavings that passed for beds, and some few relics of the time when his roof-tree knew a mistress, and his bairns a mother, can certainly not be dignified with the name. His little house, one of a terrace standing back from the main street in a yard, was well enough, and one or two of the neighbors, who took a bit of pride in their homes, managed to make bonnie pictures of their domains, though they were poor enough, good faith; and there was even a bit of garden ground attached to each tenancy, just down by the back side; but Tommy Smart's garden was a fair counterpart of Tommy Smart's home, and in it, as in the garden of Watt's sluggard, one might have seen the thorns and the thistles grow broader and higher.

All this was a natural consequence of Tommy Smart's extravagance, for he was obliged to pinch himself in the matter of expenditure in all other things, that the flow of liquor might have but little stint. Nor would this have mattered so much if he alone had been affected by the operation. In that case he might have so far pinched himself as to have pinched himself out of existence, and he would have been neither mourned nor missed, nor would any living soul have been the worse for it. Sad and sorrowful a thing to say, but as absolutely true as it is sad and sorrowful.

There was a time, not so very long ago either, when Tom (not Tommy) Smart was, as his name suggests, as smart and likely a fellow as could be found in all the Riding. Never a ploughman could turn a straighter

furrow. Never a waggoner could better handle a team of horses. Never a harvester could mow a wider or a cleaner swathe. In those days Tom was quite an object of competition among the farmers, every one of whom was ready to hire him at the highest wage.

At that time he was the only son of his mother, and she a widow, and everybody admired the diligent and loving way in which he did more than his duty to her, if that be possible, and filled her life with gladness and her eyes with smiles, until the reaper, whose name is Death, gathered her in the sweep of his sickle for the Harvest Home on high. Everybody, too, congratulated Ada Norris, housemaid at the farmhouse where he himself was employed, when, sometime later, he married her, and housed her in a cosy cottage, rented from his master; and they prophesied abounding happiness and prosperity to the young couple, and said they wouldn't wonder a bit if in a little while they had a farm of their own.

In a very short time his employer, Farmer Wilkinson, of Dulton Wold, made him his foreman, and was profuse in his promises to further his interests, for he genuinely respected both him and his young wife. Under Tom's able management, the farm, always a good one, improved vastly. The foreman's eye became almost as good as the master's, and as a consequence there was no skulking or half-shod work. Then came a tremendous harvest. The seasons seemed to fall once again into their almanac order, and the broad acres of Dulton Wold were a golden glory. In securing this golden spoil, Tom's ability was manifest to all comers, and by his able management he succeeded in gathering every bushel of grain without confusion, waste of time or labor, without accident, and so smartly as just to avoid the break-up of the weather that almost immediately followed. The stack-yard was never so full, the stacks were never so big and high, and Farmer Wilkinson resolved to hold a harvest supper on a scale proportionate to the splendor of his crops.

Farmer Wilkinson, was, in his way, a religious man, and though he felt conscious that he had through his agents sown the grain and tended it, yet he also felt and acknowledged that God it was who had given the increase; and so, in deep gratitude to the open-handed Providence that had filled his barns and stored his granaries, he gave everybody who cared to come the opportunity of getting 'gloriously drunk'—a privilege of which not a few availed themselves to the full. This was by no means an exceptional thing then-a-day—this was the Harvest Home of the Good Old Times, about which we hear such a lot of sentimental twaddle. By-the-way, this Harvest Home has not been vastly improved on in a good many places I could mention up to this day.

In their alcoholic frenzy the revellers remarked vociferously that they wouldn't go home till morning, till daylight did appear. A good few of them didn't go home even then: some because they couldn't, and others because they preferred to adjourn to some adjacent hostelry licensed to facilitate the transformation of the Queen's lieges into brutes or devils, imbeciles or fools.

Now, Farmer Wilkinson declared that it was largely owing to Tom's clever management and prompt activity that the harvest had been so large and so safely gathered in. So it naturally followed that Tom had to be made much of. His health had to be drunk 'with a three times three.' The most popular man of the evening, he had to drink with everybody, and everybody had to drink with him. Tom was ever a cheerful, genial, open-hearted soul, and so he surrendered himself to the spirit of the occasion, and might have testified, as I have heard a workman boastingly testify more than once, 'I never was so drunk in my life.'

(To be Continued.)