

THE RED, RED WINE:

A TEMPERANCE STORY.

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

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(CHAPTER VII.—Continued.)

The toast of the evening, however, was 'Success to the York and Netherborough Railway.' Of course, wonderful things were said of it, and wonderful prophecies were ventured concerning it, and everybody agreed that Netherborough was now on the high road to prosperity. 'Richard Bardsley, Esquire,' was the name coupled with this toast. It is wonderful what a crop of esquires grow up suddenly, like mushrooms, on occasions of this sort. Richard, or, rather, Dick Bardsley—for that was his working-name—was none other than the elder brother in the firm of drysalters to which I have already referred. He and his brother Walter did not get on well. The elder regarded the younger as somewhat priggish, to use his own slangy mode of speech. Richard was, as we have said, over fond of a 'social glass,' and Walter's staunch cold water principles and practice were a tacit reproof that galled him a good deal. He felt that the opportunity had come to turn the tables on the teetotaler.

'I am glad, Mr. Chairman, that you have called for a bumper in honor of the toast to which I am proud to respond,' said he, at the close of his brief speech. 'The railway itself may well be regarded as a bumper, for I am persuaded that it will be a full cup, brimful of prosperity to our town; and even at the risk of a little confusion of metaphors, I will add that it will bump adversity, hard times, and bad trade clean out of Netherborough!'

It need hardly be said that this extravagant prophecy was greeted with uproarious cheers, especially when it is remembered that the 'red, red wine,' had by this time reddened the faces, quickened the pulses, heated the blood, and muddled the brains of the majority.

'It is surely a fitting thing, Mr. Chairman,' continued Richard Bardsley, 'that so exhilarating a sentiment should be drunk in champagne; that monarch among wines which has been called "crown of the vineyard," just as that generous liquor, port, has been called its "cardinal." I have noticed that one gentleman in this present company has thought water to be good enough for the drinking of toasts on this occasion; aye, even that of Her most Gracious Majesty the Queen!'

'I don't agree with him! I am persuaded that none of us will agree with him; and, indeed, I, for one, protest against such a mockery of ancient rule and usage, and such a breach of good fellowship. We initiate to-day the best stroke of fortune that has ever come to Netherborough; the railway has the best chairman to be found in England; we have joined in the best dinner that was ever served at the "Netherborough Arms"; we are in the best of spirits as to the future of our town, and I say for one that the occasion is worthy of the best of liquor, and that is champagne!'

Young Walter Bardsley was a good deal disconcerted. It was, indeed, a very unpleasant predicament for him to be placed in. He was probably the youngest man in the room, except Cuthbert Hayes, who had stolen in after the banquet to hear the speeches. Walter knew that the eyes of the whole company were turned upon him, the one well-known abstainer there. He knew that he had turned suddenly white, and had then blushed like a school-boy. But he kept his fingers on the tumbler of water he had been sipping, and in a little while self-mastery stilled his nerves, and brought a smile to his face, which showed that he meant to stand by his colors, come what might!

In a little while an unexpected opportunity came to him of replying to the onslaught of his brother Dick. In the absence of the gentleman who had been appointed to 'speak to the toast'—'The Trade of the Town,' that of-

fice was charged upon 'Mr. Walter Bardsley!' This suggestion had been made to the chairman by Mr. Norwood Hayes, who was a dear lover of fair-play. He had resolved that the young man should have the opportunity of giving his elder brother a Rowland for his Oliver.

The young abstainer rose to his feet. He was a little nervous. This was the second time he had been taken by surprise, and he had a little difficulty in bracing himself for the task before him. He was a good speaker, quite exceptional in that respect in the Mechanics' Institute of Netherborough, and was said to be a good second even to his mentor and model, Mr. Norwood Hayes. He spoke of the various trades that were carried on in the town, and testified to the warmth and genuineness of his interest in the prosperity of his native place. He got fairly hold of his audience by his play upon the fact that he was a town lad, engaged in the trade of the town; then he put his heart into the work. He pictured in glowing terms what his dear native place might be as to its homes, its morality, its comfort, its prosperity, and then concluded as follows:

'That is what Netherborough might be, like Jerusalem of old, a joy and a delight. But will it be? What magic power can work the glorious change? Our renowned chairman has been called the great magician of his day, but does he wield the conjuror's wand that can lift the "curse of Netherborough," and brighten its streets and lanes and alleys with glad and happy life?' (Here the railway monarch shook his head.) 'He himself says, No. Will the new railway bring such Arcadian happiness to the town we love? It may do something for our material prosperity—will do, I do not doubt, but what will be the real gain of that, if the physical and social conditions of the people are not improved?'

'No, I tell you,' continued the young orator, 'every material force you may bring to bear on Netherborough, will fail to put an end to its crime, its ignorance, its poverty, its squalor, and its shame, until you banish the bottle and put a ban upon the beer-barrel; until you expel the licensed drink-shops from the town they are bringing to ruin, and until it is found that this—here he lifted up his tumbler filled to the brim with water—is the best liquor in the world,—the true, sparkling gift of God; and in it, and in it only, I drink to a sober Netherborough and "the trade of the town!"'

Some of the guests cheered the speech uproariously; but then they were so far dulle and dazed with liquor that they did not perceive the drift of Walter's speech, and would have given uproarious cheers for anything, their own dispatch by the common hangman, say, or a proposal to make a bonfire of the 'Netherborough Arms.' Others received it in the sullen silence of dismay; and others, such as Dr. Medway, Reuben Stanford, and Richard Bardsley contented themselves with loud shouts of 'No, no!' 'Nonsense,' and short laughs in which they dubbed the speaker tacitly as a fanatic and a fool.

Lord Seaton put up his eye-glass, twirled the corner of his incipient moustache, and whispered to the Vicar on his right, 'a dangerous fellow, that—ah—one of those Chartists—ah, wears a white hat, I expect, and—and all that, don't you know?'

The Vicar smiled—it's so convenient, that, for who can tell what a smile may mean? It is a handy non-committal kind of response. In this way the good man avoided any condemnation of the heroic Walter, which his conscience forbade him to do; and avoided also any approval which his preference for the conventionalities and usages of social life would certainly have prompted him to give.

There was one fine young fellow present who

gazed upon Walter Bardsley, as he took his seat, with undisguised admiration, and that was the son of Mr. Norwood Hayes. When Walter happened to turn his eyes in the direction of Cuthbert Hayes, he was greeted with a succession of nods, accompanied by a gleam of the eyes and a smile on the face which said as plain as could be, 'You are a hero, and you are right!'

Just at that moment Cuthbert heard his father's voice. He was speaking to Dr. Dunwell, the minister of Zion Chapel, who was retiring, as was also the Vicar, from the evening's proceedings. Probably that much was owing to Walter's honest and courageous witness for the truth. Mr. Dunwell had said something to Mr. Hayes in passing, to the effect that Walter had at any rate the courage of his opinion.

'Yes,' said Mr. Norwood Hayes, 'Walter's a splendid fellow,' and this is what Cuthbert overheard—if he would only be a little less fanatical, drop his teetotal fad, and go in for teaching the virtues of a manly self-control, he would arrive at the same ends by far less extravagant and indeed impossible means.'

'Just so,' said Mr. Dunwell, and passed out into the night.

Cuthbert dropped his head and thought the matter over. He said to himself,

'Father condemns Walter's cold water principles. He ought to know. I think he knows everything.' As he spoke he looked at his father, and noticed that the wine in his glass had neither increased nor lessened during the last hour. There he sat as self-contained and as thoroughly master of himself as he was at his own breakfast table that morning—all because he was a 'man who was king of himself.'

Cuthbert, in the first warmth of his feelings had intended to go to Walter, shake him warmly by the hand and say, 'I will join you, Walter, and stand beside you under the cold water flag.' But now he scarcely thought he would. He dearly wanted to be as good and strong a man as his father, and he would have spurned the idea that anybody could be better. Like his sister Alice, he was proud of him. Father did not abstain, then why should he? He did not want his father, of all people, to think him one. Then again, Mr. Dunwell said, 'Just so,' to his father's views about it. 'No,' he said, rousing himself from his cogitations, 'I'll remain as I am, able to take care of myself.'

His father and his pastor led him to that decision.

Poor Cuthbert Hayes! On that subject I cannot just now trust my pen to write, or my mind to dictate. Wait awhile, I shall calm down a little by-and-by. His father and his pastor! The minister and the deacon! And both of them good men, earnest, honest, kindly, and true!

Walter Bardsley's speech had raised such a hubbub that Mr. Huddleston, the chairman, was glad to create a diversion by calling the next toast.

And so the night went on! Songs were called for, bacchanalian ditties having the preference; glasses were constantly refilled, the cigars were handed round, and, as an old author says, 'reason set to reeling in odd contortions.' Finally somebody suggested 'The Ladies,' though there were none there. Then 'Stanford' 'Stanford!' was noisily called on to respond. The 'handsome Vet.,' whose day's drinking was well nigh a month's abstinence, began in the company of the worthy Vicar and Norwood Hayes, could, by this time hardly stand upright on his feet. As he stood or tried to stand, by the aid afforded him by the table, Reuben Stanford who was always said to 'look every inch a man,' looked every inch a sot.

He murmured out a few incoherent sentences; and then the poor fool, self-made by