

BOYS AND GIRLS

THE RED, RED WINE:

A TEMPERANCE STORY.

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

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(CHAPTER XXIX.—Continued.)

'Good mornin', Kitty,' said the old man, lifting the little lady into his arms that he might hug her as a lover should. 'Then you ain't been to the weddin' this mornin'. I should ha' thowt yo' couldn't ha' kept away. They say all women like a weddin', an' that means lahtle women as well as grown un's. The old man laughed heartily at his own humor, and Kitty archly replied:—

'No, I ain't been, gran'feather, but you hev, ain't yo'? Why, you look as happy as if you'd gone an' been an' gotten married yourself,' said the merry little maiden. Still she kissed him as though she had a right to him for all that.

'What, me, my little sweetheart? Me go an' marry onybody but my lahtle lassie, an' be happy? Come, come Kitty, you can't think that! Hoo can yo' be sae cruel? Look you here, Miss Catherine Smart, I'd better tek' up my hat an'—'

'Hush, this minnit!' Then two little hands were closely pressed on the old man's mouth, and then two little lips were glued thereto instead; the dreadful injustice was condoned, and the course of true love did run smooth again.

'Ah let the chilther go to see t' weddin',' explained Kitty. 'Ah thowt it wad please 'em; an' a feyther tore his jersey yester, so Ah got a bit o' quiet tahnme to mend it. But,' continued she, viewing the torn garment with a discontented eye, as she held it in her hands, 'Ah dizn't get on with it; it's o'kard soort o' stuff, yo' see.'

'Hey, that it is,' said the sympathetic Aaron, eyeing Kitty's bungling attempt at repairs; 'but I'll tell yo' what, little woman, you've done your best, an' angels can dae nae mair then that. Just lap it up fo' me in a bit o' paper, an' I'll tek' it to Esther Harland. She'll put it to rights in a jiffey.'

Aaron was more than repaid by the grateful smile that lightened up the child's anxious face. Once again the long, white, silken hair was streaming in the breeze, as the devoted lover sped along the street on an errand of help and comfort for a little child—one of these little ones—of whom the Christ takes special note, and for whose sake the benedictions fall. Aaron's heart was attuned to the chiming of the bells, and the golden sunshine was over all.

Alas, alas, a bolt fell out of the blue; thunder boomed from a clear sky, and on the happy servant of this kind, a great, great sorrow fell. Later in the day he was again met by Lawyer Everett. He had just brought his purple features out of the doorway of the 'Griffin,' with an additional glow upon them, in honor, he said, of the wedding day. He greeted Aaron Brigham with a coarse and triumphant chuckle. The time had come for a tremendous retort to the old man's hint about the 'Griffin.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed he. 'What do you think of your pattern young man now? His young wife's got him into leading strings at once, like a sensible woman, and Walter Bardsley's teetotal fad is a burst bubble!'

'What do yo' mean, Everett?' said the old man. His heart beat fast, and he felt sick and faint.

'Mean? Why I mean that the wise and wilful Walter has pledged his father-in-law in champagne; has left the ranks of the cold water lunatics and snowed himself a man! Hasn't he, Dick?'

This question was addressed to Dick Bardsley, who had followed him out of the 'Griffin,' and who still wore the wedding favor pinned upon his coat.

'Hey, marry, Alice has done the trick for him. I hope to see him jolly well drunk within a month of Sundays. He's got the Bardsley drought on him; and I shall never be pestered with his confounded advice. If he ever saw me enjoying my glass, he always looked sour enough to curdle new milk. I shall get my liquor in comfort now, and have a new comrade to go on the booze with. Come in,



'WHAT DO YO' MEAN, EVERETT?' SAID
THE OLD MAN.'

Aaron, you can't do better than follow a good example. It's a poor heart that never rejoices. I'll stand treat—'

But Aaron Brigham had silently departed. The sunshine had darkened out of his sky; the warmth that had glowed so pleasantly round his heart, had given place to a chill, numb heaviness, and the long deep-drawn sighs that rose from his heaving breast, told the worldless story of the exceeding bitter sorrow of his soul.

How he found his way to Lily Lodge he knew not. As he crossed the threshold of its trellised porch, his wan, white face, so ghostly and so sad, elicited a scream from Esther Harland, who thought her master stricken, and feared the worst.

'Why, Aaron!' she said, touched to the quick at the sight of his grief. 'Whatever is the matter wi' yo'?'

She was only just in time to guide his swerving footsteps to the old arm-chair in the chimney corner. With a groan that made the good housekeeper's flesh creep, the old man placed his two arms upon the little table, laid his head thereon, and abandoned himself to a very tremor and passion of tears.

Tears do not come readily to the eyes of the old, and there are few sights more distressing than the heart-break of bending age weeping out its agony, with no words to tell the tale. O, if Walter Bardsley could only have seen that sight; if only that poor, foolish bride, Alice, could have looked on that strange vision; surely, if even Mr. Norwood Hayes had taken in that harrowing scene, the young man's reckless plunge, so lightly made, and so glibly applauded, might have aroused a terror of apprehension, alarm, and strong remorse.

For awhile, Esther Harland could but look

on in silence, dropping companion tears, and laying her hand gently on his good, grey head. Then the customary self-command came back to him.

'Esther, my lass, I've better now,' he said, 'But I feel as though I've a'most had my death-blow! Walter Bardsley's brokken his pledge on his weddin' day. The "Bardsley drought" 'll rush 'im to his grave at a gallop, an' that sweet Alice hez bargained for a blighted life, an' a brokken heart!'

'Nay, nay, owd friend. You mawn't prophecy sae bad as that,' said Esther. 'It's mebbe nobbut a sudden slip. Ah dare say he'll sign again, noo that he's married. You'll ha' to pray for him.'

'Pray for him!' said Aaron, bringing down his clenched hand on the table, 'Ah could gi' my poor aud life for the lad. Poor, poor Walter! Would God I had died for thee!'

He rose to his feet, walked unassisted to his bedroom, closed the door behind him, locked it promptly, and Esther Harland knew, by that well-known token, that he had gone to talk with God; had gone to struggle, like the wrestler by the brook Jabbock, for the life and soul of Walter Bardsley! When he came forth from the place he was as one transfigured, and the much-relieved Esther knew that his grief was restrained, that his hope was kindled, and that his soul was strong.

Then a strange thing happened. George Caffer had come in to get his supper after the labors of the day, and Phil Lambert had turned in of set purpose to speak a cheery word to his comrade, and to report himself to Aaron with a repetition of that 'Niver nae mair,' which had made music that morning in the old man's ears. And even while yet the pleasant little interview was being held, Tom Smart and dear little maid Kitty, came along to fetch the mended jersey, and save gran'feather an evening walk. Tom's answer to Aaron's inquiry as to his welfare, was a calm, contented, re-assuring smile; and as the old man noted how much little Kitty's face and fortune had improved since 'feyther turned teetotal,' a great wave of thankfulness swept over the old man's soul. Caffer, and Lambert, and Smart, and Kitty—the good Lord had gathered them round to cheer and comfort him; and Walter Bardsley, by the help of God, should become, despite the old man's fear, the prey, for Christ's sake, of his bow and his spear!

CHAPTER XXX.

While Aaron Brigham was letting fall hot tears for Walter Bardsley's sore betrayal of his trust, the young bridegroom was speeding along by special coach to Scarborough with his fair bride beside him. But how utterly the gladness of that journey has been discounted! He is trying, like a man, like a lover, like a husband, to make the time pass blithely and delightfully for the maiden he so longs to love and cherish. He has been a perfect Samson in his capacity for making others happy. He has ever been the joy of every holiday, the soul of every pleasure-party, and the spring of every social delight, but, Samson though he is, he fails utterly now. His locks are shorn.

(To be Continued.)

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