

DE TREMENS & CO.

A WARNING.—BY A. L. YOUNG.

One day about five years ago I was journeying in my buggy through a certain section of Southern Ohio. The day was dull and damp and a heavy mist pervaded creation; the hedgerows on either side of the road, the people I met or overtook, the cows and sheep in the fields, the crows and sparrows, the houses I passed, seemed utterly miserable, wet through, done up, and mystified. I have weathered many a storm, have been wet and dry again two or three times a day; I have been spilt into ditches, pitched into hedges and against stone walls; I have been robbed and nobbed by footpads and life preservers; but never before had I lost the natural buoyancy and jollity of my disposition. On the morning of the day in question, however, I felt like all things animate and inanimate—to speak commercially, fozzled. Of course I had my remedy with me in my driving-box, which I soon pressed into service; it was a pint flask, full of the purest brandy. "This is balm of Gilead for any weather," thought I, as I took my first dose. My mouth exactly holds one-eighth of a pint.

Hundreds of gallons have travelled the same way, but I believe ambrosial nectar could never have been so grateful to a thirsty god as that streak of liquid sunshine was to me. I felt my chest expand and my mind's eye could see my eyes sparkle with a glint of their natural fire. What cared I for wet without? The whisky within was proof against watery particles, and defied them in any shape. So, taking another drink to make sure that I had not served out short measure on the previous occasion, I jogged on, sometimes speculating as to my future, refreshing my memory and spurring my hopes with spirits of the Elixir, until in due course I arrived at the Washington Hotel, at ———, full of my usual spirits, and with an empty flask.

After a hearty meal I called for my pipe and jorum of toddy, and resigning myself to the soothing influence of the weed and whisky, I waited patiently for an arrival to spend the evening with; for I was alone in the commercial room, and the only signs recognizable to my senses were those of the rain pelting away at the window, and the hollow rumbling of stray vehicles over the paving-stones.

I did not count—I never do—but I believe I had arrived at my fifth grog and pipe, when, feeling chilly, I drew the heavy arm-chair closer to the fire; this little act occupied several minutes, for the bandy legs of the stupid old chair would make for themselves a place under the hearth-rug. I tried to circumvent the awkward limbs, and temporized with my toe; but the more I kept on wanting to get them right, the more they kept on not wanting to be righted, and, being sidgety in all little matters of personal comfort, I was positively obliged at the risk of a rush of blood to the head, to lift the club-footed old chair with one hand, and to lay the refractory corner of the rug with the other.

When, by this effort of exhausted nature, I had accomplished my object, I took a stiff pull at my replenished toddy, filled my pipe and lighted it, and with the feeling of a man who has obtained a victory, I threw myself into my late enemy's lap, pinched his mahogany

old arms with my elbows, stretched out my feet upon the fender and laughed outright at my triumph, with my usual jolly Ha! ha! till the room rang again.

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" till the room rang again, followed like an echo the Ha! ha! that originally belonged to me.

To my surprise and delight, I found an arrival had ensconced himself in the fellow chair to mine, had his jorum of toddy on the other corner of the mantel, his pipe in full blast, his elbows on the mahogany arms of my late enemy's own brother, and his toes almost touching mine on the fender.

I looked at the arrival and the arrival looked at me. I bowed at him, and received a courteous bow in return.

"Wet night," said I.

"Wet night," said he.

"And cold," said I.

"And cold," said he.

"Nice fire," said I.

"Nice fire," said he.

He seemed to give his words my exact intonation.

He was winking me!

"Darn it!" said I, and laughed.

"Darn it!" said he, and laughed—laughed so much like me that I couldn't distinguish any difference, either in quantity or quality; he was right to a single Ha!

I took another pull at my toddy, and so did he! I smoked my pipe serenely, and made a very deliberate survey of my friend. He became immediately engaged in the same interesting occupation with me. He was a man about my own age, and evinced his taste by adopting a style of costume closely resembling my own. I noticed particularly, that his feet were encased in French cloth boots, with narrow tips of patent leather at the toes, like mine; in fact, I felt tempted to offer him considerable odds that I could name the maker and the number of the lasts upon which they were made. His face, too, seemed to be very like my style of face; there was the noble brow, the partially bald pate, the expressive mouth, the magnificent teeth, the chiseled nose, the—no, not the eloquent dark eyes—the same sort of eyes though, differing only from mine in one little particular feature. His eyes had a ring round each, caused perhaps by cold or grief; nor could he boast of a rosy fresh complexion such as mine; his was most decidedly choleric—blue as indigo.

I am fond of harmless fun, and I confess I fervently wished for a few more arrivals to enjoy it with me. In the space of a few minutes, I invented a dozen funny things to say; the last was so rich, that I laughed outright. And so did he.

We sat and looked at each other. I noticed that when I took a drink, he did the same. When I puffed, he puffed. If I moved a hand or foot, so did he.

I could stand it no longer; I was angry, and I said to him—"I am not to be insulted with impunity, sir! My name is Brown—there's my card; stand up like a man, sir!"

My blood was up.

The cadaverous wretch repeated my words and actions, and handed me a card on which was engraved, "De Tremens & Co., Wine and Spirit Merchants."

I finished my toddy, took off my coat, went to the door, and pocketed the key. But never for an instant did he take his eyes off me. He was quite ready for me. He waited for me.

His azure countenance had changed; he looked fiendish.

The noble art of self-defense formed a feature in my education; when at school I could parry and counter capitably; my blow was equal to a hundred and thirty-seven pounds, and I could give the upper cut beautifully; but somehow I felt afraid of this fellow, and I looked at him as fiercely as I could, in the hope that he would make me an apology. Nothing of the kind! On the contrary, his demoniacal scowl grew fiercer and wilder every moment, the redness round his eyes became more strongly defined, and his orbs shone with a dazzle that seemed to freeze my blood. I would have given a month's salary and expenses to boot, to have been safely anywhere else. I looked at the window as the thought rose, and determined to risk a limb by jumping through it into the street below. But to do so I must pass him. His eyes were upon me, and I gave up the idea as soon as formed.

I had contrived, however, to have the table between us, and thus we were face to face. I could not now look him straight in the eye, as I had always been accustomed to look at a man.

I shrank from his terrible stare and my blood seemed to gallop as though every drop in my body had entered for and was running on a steeple-chase through my veins, with a wind-up leap from my heart to my brain.

To my horror I became sensible that the table was moving with a slow but certain motion toward the side of the room. I held it with all my strength, but without avail. My antagonist was evidently a much stronger man than myself, and had the design of making for himself a fair field on which to exhibit his prowess. I would have pulled the bell out by its roots for help, but my hands were riveted to the table. I moved with it against my will; his terrible eyes were upon me.

At last the table touched the wall; my enemy lifted his hands, and as he did so I found mine were released. Quick as lightning, I remembered that I had a large spring-backed knife in my pocket, I thrust my hand in search of it; but I was already in the grip of a vice, receiving blows that would not have disgraced a mammoth hammer. I was knocked down; I was knocked up; I was thrown over his head, kicked in many places at once, jumped upon, knelt upon, my teeth were punched out, my nose was flattened, my neck dislocated, my skull fractured, my ribs smashed in, before I could even plant with my left upon any part of my antagonist.

At length I obtained freedom for my right hand; the next minute he was dead at my feet. With great difficulty I arose, and, drawing the table to its original position, hid the body underneath. Then, with an inexpressible feeling of triumph, I wiped my trusty weapon.

Horror! In every chair, on every table, on the solemn old clock, on a row on the mantel-shelf, were new arrivals! All waiting to have a turn with me!

The morning after my arrival at the Washington I found myself in bed, strapped down. The people of the inn told me that I had been mad the night before, and had fought a battle royal with every article of furniture in the room. I knew better of course, but I kept my own counsel. I could have told them that I had conquered not only De Tremens himself, but also his awful Co.