

THE RED, RED WINE:

A TEMPERANCE STORY.

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

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CHAPTER XV.—(Continued.)

She had quite a wealth of curly brown hair on her well-formed little head, and the dark brown eyes that looked at you from beneath equally plentiful brows and lashes were eloquent of strength of purpose and of strength of love. The rest of her sweet little face was quite in keeping. Without being beautiful she was bonnie, and, on the whole, the latter is by far the best and most enduring in this work-a-day world. She would, I think, have been accounted well sized for her years. I am very pleased at that, for 'heroines' are all either 'tall and stately,' or 'short and piquant,' and as I know I have got here one of the truest 'heroines' that ever was, I am glad she has a stature of her own.

Now, there was one person in Netherborough in whose eyes Kitty Smart was beautiful. He had fallen, as we say, head over ears in love with her, and never a village maiden had a more faithful swain than he. It is a well-known adage that pity is akin to love, and it was out of kindly Christian pity that Aaron Brigham first made acquaintance with the small house-keeper of Tommy Smart's establishment. He noticed with admiration and delight the way in which she cared for her two little sisters and the still 'littler' brother, whom she called collectively 'the chilter.' He undertook to teach her to read, to help her in her household tasks, more especially to instruct her in the truths of Jesus and His love.

Kitty was an apt and willing scholar; she had a gentle spirit, and a loving heart, as well as a bonnie face; and so it came to pass that her aged friend became her lover, and as every true lover ought to have, he had the youthful maiden's dearest affection as his greatest reward. She was his 'lahtle lassie,' and he, by mutual agreement and consent was her 'gran'feyther.'

Poor little Kitty had a hard time of it all the weary days and nights that her father was laid up with the manifold injuries he had received from Sir John Barleycorn's agents on Netherborough Green. He was cross and peevish, and being deprived of beer, the only thing in the world he cared for, he was restless, ill-tempered, and bad to manage or control. At any rate, all this was true during the early part of his unwilling imprisonment at home. During the last few days, things changed wonderfully for the better.

I have said that beer was the only thing in the world that Tommy Smart cared for. On second thoughts, I am compelled to believe that in some small degree he did appreciate the brave little maiden who was a true mother to his children, and a long, long way the best friend he had in all the world. For some days before he was thoroughly up and about again, Kitty had noticed her father watching her with a kindly look, and his voice was marked by a kindlier and softer tone. The dear child began to have a flutter of hope about the heart that he would be more like a father than all the bad, doleful days in which she had known the word as something to be afraid of.

'Ah think Ah can get oot a bit te-day, Kitty, said her father, who had, for some days past, been able to hobble about the floor a bit by the aid of a stout stick. 'It's nice an' warm i' t' middle o' t' day. Ah think Ah can manage it.'

'I think you can't,' said the little housekeeper. She would have been dearly glad to get him out of the house for a while, but she was afraid that his sojourn in the open air would end in a visit to the 'Blue Bell,' the 'Red Cow,' his favorite haunt, was too far away—the 'Blue Bell' was dangerously near.

Poor Tommy looked so thoroughly disappointed, and withal so mild and tractable, that Kitty was sorry for him, and tried to find a

middle course. A bright idea dawned upon her.

'I'll tell yo' what we'll do, feyther, we'll ask Mrs. Consett to let yo' walk up an' down their garden. I wish gran'feyther wad cum an' help yo'. I want to get t' weshin' done, and there's little Jacky's pinny to mend, an'—'

Tommy was smitten with a great pity for the poor bairn of many cares, to whom he had shown such scant affection.

'Hang it, lahtle wench,' said he, in a fit of tenderness, looking at the child's pallid face, 'let t' weshin' be, te ta' its luck, an' cum thoo oot wi' me a bit, that's a good lass.'

Kitty brightened up at once. The earthen bowl in which the 'weshin' lay unfinished was put aside into a corner. Polly, her next sister, who had scarcely seen six summers, was put in charge of the house, and in a little time the lame man and the valorous Kitty were slowly sauntering in their neighbor's garden in the warm light of the autumnal sun.

Mr. Consett stood at her kitchen table gazing at her visitors through the window. She lifted her arm and shook her closed fist at the unconscious sinner, and apostrophised him strongly under her breath.

'You born rascal, an' weecastrel, an' idiot fool! You don't deserve te own sitch a little jewel of a blessin' as that dear bairn. Ah reckon she's left her bit o' weshin' to give you a bit o' sunshine. It's precious little sunshine you've iver given her.'

Leaving her house by the front door, Mrs. Consett slipped into Smart's cottage, lifted the big bowl on to a crippled chair, and after a few well-used minutes, she had finished the wash, and hung it on the string suspended across the ceiling to dry.

Tommy Smart had come out into the garden in a softened mood. The influence of the warm sunshine was as if it played on wax,—he melted more and more. At length he spoke what was in his heart.

'Kitty, lass,' said he.

'Yes, feyther,' says Kitty, simply.

'Thoo hez a hard tahme on it.'

'Yis, feyther, it is a bit bad to bide sum-tahmes.'

'Ah don't knea hoo thoo manishes it.'

'I gets help, daddy.' It was a long time since that child-name had come from Kitty's lips.

'Nut fre' me thoo dizn't. Ah sud be a good deal better oot o' thy road. Whea diz help tha?'

A pair of dark brown eyes were lifted to meet his own eyes swimming in a mist of tears. A pair of sweet little lips quivered with emotion as they uttered softly, tremulously, one sweet word, 'Jesus!'

There was silence for a brief space. Tom Smart was thinking. The operation was unfamiliar; its processes were slow; its drift, had he put it into words, was this: 'There's no help for me.'

In the silence, brave Kitty was thinking, too.

'I say, daddie,' said she, insinuatingly.

'What is it, Kitty?' replied her father, with quite unwonted tenderness in his tones.

'Do you want helpin'?'

'Nowt can help me; neeather nowt nor no-body.'

The words were a passionate and despairing cry—a wail of hopeless regret.

'Yes, daddie, Jesus can.'

'Mebbe, He cud, but He weean't,' said her father, as one who feels himself cast out and cast off.

'Hev' yo' axed Him? I does, every day.'

'And what diz tha' say, Kitty?'

'I says, "Oor Father, which art in heaven," an' sometahmes,

"Gentle Jesus, meek an' mild,
Look upon a little child;"

an' sumtahmes I says just nowt, but I thinks about Him an' wants hard, an' gran'feyther says that Jesus hears that when his chilter—'

'Hey, Ah sudn't wanther but He diz, but Ah isn't His child. Ah's nowt but a great big sim—'

'Whisht, daddie, whisht!' said the poor little maiden. She would not hear him condemn himself to her.

'If you ain't a little child, He knows you're little Kitty's feyther, 'cos I've talked to Him about yo'.'

'Thoo hez!' said Tom, in amaze; 'why, wheea tell'd tha' te deea that?'

'Gran'feyther did,' said Kitty; 'and here he is!' As she spoke, every line of her face was lighted up with joy.

The old man stepped forward to greet his 'fair one' and to receive his reward in kind. Then he gave his arm to the weary invalid.

'Hey, Tommy!' said Aaron, heartily; 'why, this is summat like! I see glad to see yo' get-tan' sum fresh air an' sunshine. You'll get on all the better for it.'

'Get on,' said Smart, in a voice filled with discontent and disgust about himself. 'Ah don't think 't it's worth while, Aaron. It wad be all the better, booth for myself an' other foaks, if Ah cud manish to get off, an' let there be an' end o' me.'

Aaron Brigham was thankful to find that Tom Smart's adamant indifference had been fractured at last, and that the arm that had dealt the blow was the Christ-endowed arm of a little child—his own 'lahtle lassie,' his beloved Kitty. Tom's passionate words of shame were music to him; and to his expression, 'It wad be better if I could get off and let there be an end o' me,' Aaron replied, as they sauntered round the garden.

'Nay, marry, nay. All you want, Tommy, is to get off the drink, an' get on to Jesus Christ, an' for an' your bairns to go to heaven together. Hey, man, that Kitty o' thahne's a precious lahtle—'

'Ah knoa! Ah knoa!' said Tommy, unable to stand any farther probing into a wound that was already very sore. 'Look yo' here, Aaron Brigham,' he continued, lifting his clenched hand, as if he would strike his own worthless self, 'Ah'll ceather mend mysen, or end mysen, or Ah'll tak' mysen off a thousand miles away.'

'You mustn't do either one nor t' other,' said Aaron, laying his hand kindly on Tom's arm. 'You must get Jesus to mend yo' an' you must be a co-worker with Him, by signin' t' pledge, an' holdin' on to it, in His strength. Tom, owd friend, I beg an' pray o' yo', never, never, touch another drop!'

Quoth Tom Smart, as he paused a moment on the garden walk:

'Wi' the help o' God and Kitty, Ah niver will.'

If ever man meant it when he said it, Tommy Smart meant it then. But the odds were desperately against him.

CHAPTER XVI.

That evening Mr. Norwood Hayes called in a friendly way, as his custom was, to spend an hour with Aaron Brigham at Lily Lodge. Both these men could talk, and talk well, and when they got together, each one knew and felt that he had a listener that was worth talking to.