

ERNEST ADLER.

BY MARGARET E. WINSLOW.
National Temperance Society, New York.
CHAPTER III.—DOWN HILL.

That unfortunate New Year's Day gave the coloring to the next phase of Ernest Adler's life. It lasted through the Freshman, Sophomore, and part of the Junior year. All Harton soon got hold of the New Year's scandal, and testified its knowledge by averted looks and whispered comments, which the boy was quick to decipher and equally quick to resent. He failed to see in his honest, straightforward boyishness, why what was pardonable "spit" in Senator Livermore's son from Colorado, and "duck" in ex-Minist Wharton's boy from Washington, was in the son of Professor Adler, the factor, a thing so disgraceful as to cause mothers and fathers to meet him with grave reprehension, and girls, with whom he had played from babyhood, to shrink back as though they considered his touch contamination. But there was another class of the Harton community which looked with anything but disfavor upon this last development of Ernest's character. It brought the college paragon more to their common level, and gratified the latent jealousy which his brilliant talents and educational successes had instigated.

The fast young men of the Sophomore and Junior classes saw in this hitherto immaculate Freshman a new recruit to their ranks—one, too, whose brilliancy and good humor made him a very acceptable addition to the supper parties and other half-forgotten affairs with which college life abounds. And so it came to pass that Ernest gradually, but surely, dropped from the one set into the other; ceased to be seen at the ladies' tea-parties and the societies of the elite, and was more and more often to be found in the smoking-room of the hotels, in the back parlors of certain places whose existence was winked at by the authorities, and in the company of young men with more money than either brains or moral principle. In such haunts and society he learned, of course, to play games of chance, to swear, and, alas! to drink that fascinating cup, which in the beginning appears to sparkle with all the joy and delight of life, but at the end stings and lites like the adder, which metaphorically lies curled up in its liquid depths. Not that Ernest Adler became at that early period, or ever, in the low acceptance of the term, a drunkard; his instinct, his antecedents, his culture, his whole nature was of too high and fine a tone for that, but he was keenly sensitive in every fibre, sensitive to pleasure as to pain, and the exhilaration of the wine-glass was as pleasant to his nervous system as the flattery of boon companions was to his self-consciousness, as study was to his intellectual, and objects of beauty to his aesthetic nature; while as to the moral and spiritual parts of this intensely living boy, they were, as yet, totally undeveloped, and the danger seemed to be that in the precocious maturing of lower qualities, these crown jewels of the soul would have their light extinguished forever.

Of course it was a long time before the state of the case forced itself upon the boy's home circle. His sisters were much occupied—the one with the pleasures and duties of her new home, she having recently married one of the young college professors; and the other, with the brilliant literary career just opening before her; and his father having once for all, as he thought, administered his efficient rebuke, had subsided again to his favorite pursuits, quite satisfied that his son's recitations and position among his classmates were as brilliant as ever.

With his mother the case was different. To her watchful eye the moral change in her darling could not but be perceptible; though, of course, she was the last person to whom reports of his pursuits would be brought. But she was a timid woman, this German pastor's wife; educated in the strictest foreign tenets of feminine subjection to man; a woman, moreover, of one idea—that idea, of course, being the highest ground that could be taken, namely, that the grace of God is omnipotent, and that all other reliances are in comparison valueless. Consequently, she prayed very much and talked very little, that little being confined to earnest but formal exhortations to the gay young collegian to repent and turn to

Christ, to seek the only true good, etc., etc., which, as he had listened to similar entreaties ever since his birth, passed over his consciousness like the rippling of a summer brook; and, as he felt no need of any truer good than all the pleasant things which life was now pouring at his feet, he kissed the dear, good motherchen, and floated away as soon as possible to eat, drink, and be merry in the most highly epicurean sense.

As in the case of the first fatal misstep, a few earnest sympathizing, pitying words might have turned the boy's steps away from the fatal path; so, having fairly entered upon his treacherous beauties, it may be that an attractive home life, those harmless pleasures were substituted for those of a hurtful nature, would have arrested his downward progress; but for the reasons above stated, these were not offered, and the pleasure-seeking nature, unfettered by religious principle, obeyed its instincts and sought its enjoyments where they were to be found.

It may seem trite and hackneyed to talk of the sacred influence of home; but with the facts continually brought before us of the constant march toward ruin of our brightest and most promising young men, it must be pertinent again and again to remind the fathers, mothers, and sisters of our land of their awful responsibilities toward the boys who are just gliding over that magic line which separates careless boyhood from the manhood which is to be so potent for good or evil.

Home, with its possibilities of pure pleasures and innocent enjoyments of culture to the whole aesthetic and moral nature, is a holy trust placed in our care by God himself. Let us utilize it, not only for the boys connected with us by the closest of near relationships, but for those who, removed from their own legitimate home-influences as clerks in cities or students in institutions of learning, may find in our homes the same blessed influences which God intended should come to them in their own. And let us consider no cares too heavy, no sacrifices of time, pursuits, or inclination too great to render this family temple, of which we are divinely consecrated priests and priestesses, "the very gate of Heaven."

The downward progress in such a course as Ernest had entered upon is usually very rapid, and before long it began to be whispered in the social circles of Harton—ever ready to visit with severest censure those whose position made their departures from righteousness most conspicuous—that Professor Adler's son was very dissipated and "drank like a fish." Where could the young man have learned such immoral and ungentlemanly habits? queried the self-constituted censors; such low, sensual tastes in one whose poetical and musical gifts had promised to render him almost ethereal. And it never entered the minds of the house-providers and party-givers to remember how from babyhood the precocious little pet had in their parlors been treated with sweet wine in jellies and syllabubs, and in little fairy glasses of bright Bohemian ware, till he unconsciously came to associate the sweet, exhilarating taste of the good things with the still sweeter exhilaration of the flattery which his baby songs and recitations elicited. And later, when the true state of the case came to the reluctant cognizance of the boy's father, he asked the same question of his wife in bewildered perplexity:

"Such a temperate family as we have always been," said the Professor. "Not one of my ancestors has ever been a drunkard, and we have always set an example of the perfect sobriety of a godly home."

How strange that the speaker should have forgotten his own daily potations of beer, the choice wine always offered to the guests at his table, his often-expressed scorn of "the temperance fanatics," and his laughing quotation of the proverb of his native land: "Water is for fishes, wine for men." How strange also that Mrs. Adler should be all unconscious of the influence of her home cookery, in which wine as a flavoring was so large an ingredient in forming the tastes of those who sat at her table. It is not the maxims, the formulated morality which we teach our children in set phrases, which become a part of their unwrought characters, so much as the unconscious actions and words which they see and hear in our daily lives.

"Father used to say," "Father always thought," "Father did so," are phrases com-

stantly upon the lips of many; and many a young housekeeper is sorely tried by the constantly reiterated complaints that articles upon the table "do not taste as mother's cookery used to."

But it was not "Ernest's habits had become the town talk that the rumors thereof really reached the ears of his parents, and so long as the college standing was the same, his father taught and dreamed, and his mother sighed and prayed, in sweet unconsciousness of the dark but near future.

CHAPTER IV.—WARNING.

It came at last, the long-suspended blow; the community was prepared for it; but upon the Professor it was as unexpected as a clap of thunder. At the close of the Sophomore examinations, Ernest's standing was far below the level of his class; and those on whom the gifted boy had so long looked down, outstripped him in everything. The cause was not far to seek, and the indignation of the father, intensified by his mortification and chagrin, knew no bounds. Ernest, taught by experience, knew too much to expose himself to another ebullition of that phlegmatic temper, so hard to arouse, but, when aroused, so unsparring in its denunciations.

He wandered dejectedly about the town, or spent long days roaming through the woods or rowing on the river, a prey to his own wretched thoughts and the reactions of his emotional nature, which, as his convivial friends had all gone away for the long vacation, found no solace in its accustomed excitements. Why was he such a fool? Why had he trusted so implicitly to his natural quickness, which had never before failed him, to make up for lost time at the eleventh hour, and to crowd the work of a year into its last month, the other eleven having been devoted to the life of pleasure of which he had grown so fond? Why had all the gayest and most enjoyable pleasure-parties, rows, rides, picnics, and suppers fallen within that month? Why had he been weak enough to drink so much wine at each entertainment as to confuse his brain, unsteady his hand, and absolutely unfit him for the hard mental strain which the position in which he stood rendered absolutely necessary?

He endeavored in these long soliloquies to throw the blame on the sternness and absorption of his father, the fanaticism (as he was pleased to term it) of his mother, and the selfish pharisaism of the society which had first idolized him and then cast off its idol without pity for his first offense; but he knew that he had only his own weakness and love of pleasure to blame; and as his better nature asserted itself, his repentance was very deep, if not very lasting.

In such a mood he one day encountered his brother-in-law, the young Professor Lawrence, a splendid, manly fellow, whose unflinching rectitude was backed by so many agreeable qualities as to render him a great power among the noblest and most impressive of the students. John Lawrence had a heart as well as brains, and it sorely grieved him to see his young relative deliberately throwing away the great promise of his life; moreover, he was not so far removed from the alippery path of youth as to have forgotten their seductiveness, and his pitying sympathy was strong for those who were beginning to tread therein.

"Do you know, Ernest, that you are ruining yourself by your present course, throwing away all your prospects, which have been as bright as those of any young man I ever saw? Be a man, and say at once to the temptations which have so ensnared you, 'Get thee behind me'; have nothing to do with your late companions, who are the filiest and most vicious set in the college, and regain the position you once held in your class and in the community."

"It's too late," muttered the young man dejectedly.

"Too late! Why, you are only seventeen, a boy yet, with a long life, and I trust, a very noble and useful one, before you; rouse yourself, little brother, and set about retrieving your position at once."

"Mr. Lawrence, I must have society; I was not made to live alone; the fellows are such pleasant fellows, and if I give them up who will receive me? All Harton has turned a cold shoulder on me already; even father considers me a disgrace to his house."

"Come to mine then; I will be glad to have you; and, Ernest, you know I must stay here all summer in order to superintend the fitting up of the new laboratory; I stay with us while father, mother, and Anna

take their summer tour, and if you will accept my help, I think we can recover lost ground, so that you may take your place among the Juniors as high or higher than ever before. Let us study together; that's a good fellow; it will do me good to refresh my memory with those old classics and mathematics, and, please God, I'll be mother-in-law to a man distinguished in the world of letters yet." "Please God," he said with manly reverence; and the boy knew as well as though he had delivered a formal homily that his brother-in-law meant to direct his thoughts to the only source of strength for such weakness as his.

It was a tempting offer; all the more so because of its freedom from censure and absence of all semblance of a right to control; and Ernest, accepting it in his whole-hearted way, was soon engaged body and soul in study, and with an enthusiasm which conquered every obstacle; and a teacher whose kind interest lightened every task, soon not only made up all the lost ground, but passed a special examination, secured by the intercession of John Lawrence, so perfectly, as to place him at the very head of the Juniors when the college term was recommenced. And thus once more Ernest Adler, young, handsome, gifted, and favored, started under the most auspicious circumstances upon his college career.

But, alas! for all human resolutions, all reformations based upon ambition, a desire for success, reputation, position! To some coldly calculating natures these motives may be sufficient to insure an outside change, but to warm, impulsive, enthusiastic youth, accustomed to make pleasure and amusement its first aim, they are as prairie-grass before the flame of strong temptation. Such temptation, of course, came back with the re-opening of the college gates; the old, gay, and fascinating companions came back, anything but improved by their sojourn at fashionable watering-places, where races, gaming, and other summer dissipations offered opportunity for innumerable cocktails, sherry-cobblers, and the rest of the names by which young men are wont to designate the body and soul poison.

In proportion as men deteriorate themselves is their determination to drag others down with them, and these students of Harton College, but alumni in the school of vice, had no mind to let the brilliant, fascinating Ernest Adler, in soaring upward, slip away from their grasp. They had many ways of taunting him with his newly-attained saintship, many allurement to offer in the shape of saddle-horses, buggies, and pleasures which their too full purses could provide and which his too empty one could not, and ere long he was again in their grasp more abjectly a slave to them and his own amusement than ever before. And now the downward descent was too rapid to admit of chronicle. Harton noted every step, and, as ever, expressed its disapprobation in unequivocal terms; as ever the Professor was by turns oblivious and stern, and the mother only wearied the self-doomed boy by tears and expostulations which, while they touched his sore conscience, failed to produce fruits of genuine repentance.

A great change came over the bright, fearless, open-hearted Ernest; he was moody and morose shunned his only true friend, John Lawrence, and felt as though since every man's hand was against him, his should be against every man. His was not a nature to do anything by halves, and he plunged, with a recklessness that knew no bounds, into every dissipation which college life could offer, neglecting his studies, losing place and reputation apparently with utter indifference, and gaining the unenviable notoriety of having his name associated with every college row and scandal. Of course, his sensitive conscience was not dead, and at times it gave the reckless young Junior great trouble; therefore to drown it "reproachful speaking," he had recourse more and more to the cup that served as a temporary palliative, and thus, besides frequently disgracing himself by being seen in an intoxicated condition, the unfortunate young man was daily riveting tighter and tighter the chains of a fatal habit, which would one day cause him untold anguish in ineffectual struggles for deliverance from "the body of this death." The end came very soon.

"Professor Adler," it was the dignified President of the college who spoke, "I have

done my
to consi
done in
constant
college,
sponsible
to our
young
occure
sorry
revel
decided
and wis
son was
present,
most di
lutely
notice
advise
friend,
of his d
sympat
quiver
we can
public
were i
liquor,
actions
accout
in Ger
for a v
passed
But
endur
severi
rifice,
own l
life's
munit
trust.
"Ste
voice,
strong
into h
"N
have
may
aside,
the of
to the
be m
own;
wher
be vi
as thi
son, I
Prof
table
sobbi
sym
him
decis
refu
his fi
"Ti
into
hood
occu
out.
mit
com
then
ness
pray
self
the
flam
Pr
Par
beer
the
son
last
s
the
litt
Ho
Th
fu
un
ste
fe
of
se
ou
th
ro
ra
ne
ge
fn
th
se
th
li