

# SAVED BY A WOMAN.

BY L. B. M'KAY.

Mr. Robert Macdonald was a wealthy retired dry goods merchant; and occupied a princely mansion in the suburbs of the city of B. Scotland. The house was in a blaze of light, and beautified by all the arts of modern taste—on the night when our story opens.

It was the twenty-first birthday of his only daughter Jessie, and Mr. Macdonald was giving a fashionable dinner party in honour of the event; and the invited guests were already assembling. An hour later we find them enjoying the luxuries of Mr. Macdonald's well furnished table, and laughing and chatting cheerfully—as those free from every care. At length the wine is passed around and each of the happy party drink the health of their host's daughter with sincerity and good will. "Each," we said, but that was a mistake, for there was one young man in the company who, when the wine was offered him, "begged to be excused," and said, "Mr. Macdonald, with your permission I shall drink your daughter's health in a cup of coffee." This (at that time) novel request brought forth a smile from the ladies, and a look of half surprise—half contempt from the gentlemen. While Mr. Macdonald gave a good-natured laugh as he said: "Why, bless my soul, Balfour, you don't mean to say you are afraid of a glass of wine?"

"By no means," answered Harry Balfour, "but I prefer coffee." "Why," said Mr. Macdonald, "I have always indulged in a social glass, been a church member for over twenty-five years, and have never suffered from the practice. Indeed I take it 'for my stomach's sake,' as Paul says, and also, because I have no wish to be considered an oddity in society."

"Here, here," spoke out the gentlemen, while the ladies smiled and bowed their approval. Mr. Harry Balfour was the fortunately accepted lover of Miss Jessie Macdonald, and held the position of cashier in a well-known bank in the city.

"I have always been taught to regard liquor of any kind as dangerous and injurious to both body and mind, as well as injurious to a man's best interests and instincts, and therefore I have refrained from its use," said young Balfour in answer to his host's remarks on the wine question. Had he held to these sentiments, the dark and bitter days which followed would never have been known by him. But, alas, as the sequel will show, he gave up his convictions in an evil moment to please others, and therefore lost all.

"If I thought, Balfour, that a glass of wine would harm you, I'd be the last in the world to offer it to you, but I don't think it could; and I therefore would be pleased to have you join us in drinking the health of my daughter on this her twenty-first birthday."

"Friends," added the host, "fill your glasses and let us all drink together." The glasses were filled and raised, ready to be drunk. Every eye was turned to Harry Balfour. Would he yield, or would he hold fast to his faith and bear their half-disguised contempt? His glass still stood beside his plate on the table. He was trembling on the edge of the precipice of doubt, as if he saw into the future, and beheld the abyss into which that one glass of wine would hurl him if he drank it. He glanced around—they were all waiting.

"Now, then, Harry," said his prospective father-in-law, "we wait for you."

One swift, nervous glance at his sweetheart, and a quick, impulsive motion of the hand, and his first glass was drunk with a despair that left the other guests behind with their wine untouched.

Some vices pull a man down gradually, others drag him down fearfully fast. Such is the way of wine, and so was it with Harry Balfour. His downfall from bad to worse was so rapid that six months later we find him a habitual drinker and a confirmed gambler. In his rambles around the city, he formed the acquaintance of two crooks, who were always on the look out for fresh prey. Their names were Jim Fairbanks and Bob Homer, and we find them on the night in question fleeing Balfour for all he's worth at a game of "poker." As he rises to go, having lost heavily, Fairbanks says:

"Never mind, Harry; better luck next time. Have a drink before you go. In drawing the cork, it breaks in the bottle; and he breaks its neck to get the

liquor out, and in so doing he cuts his hand. Confound the luck," he exclaims, "lend me your handkerchief, Balfour," he adds, turning to Harry. Harry complies, little dreaming that the next time he saw it, it would furnish the most damaging proof against him.

A short time ago Harry Balfour was a constant caller at the Macdonald mansion; but now his calls were like angels' visits, "few and far between;" and once or twice, when his lady love complained, and asked him where he spent his evenings, he told her "he was very busy at the bank, and that most of his time was spent there." This reply quieted her fears for the present to some extent, but Miss Macdonald felt by no means satisfied. Still she thought it best to say no more just then, but hope for the best, and give her lover the benefit of the doubt. Her quick eye, and womanly instinct told her that Harry and his caps were becoming too intimate, and even the bank clerks saw the traces of drink and dissipation on his once handsome face.

"Balfour, I want you to meet me in the office to-night at nine o'clock; there's a little difficulty here (pointing to the bank ledger) about which I wish to consult you."

The speaker was Richard Ryonals, the bank manager, and the time was the 21st of December.

"All right, sir; I'll be on hand."

"I am sorry to find several false entries in the ledger by young Brownlee, whom you recommended to me last spring," said the manager to the cashier, when they were seated in the office of the former on the night in question.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Harry, in surprise.

"Too true," replied Mr. Ryonals, "and now, Balfour, tell me what you advise."

"Why, an investigation of course, sir, and—"

"What I have done already," interrupted Mr. Ryonals; "and I fear I must have him arrested."

"It will be a great blow to his parents, and I would very much like if you could give him another chance," pleaded the cashier. They had talked for two hours, and Mr. Ryonals rose to go.

"Balfour," he said, "I can't afford to have a dishonest man in my employ, no matter what the consequences may be. Good night, Balfour."

"Good night, sir," said Harry, as he closed the outer door, and made his way homeward.

Just as he quitted the bank, two men entered, and stole quietly along to the manager's room.

"Just in time," said a voice to them, as they halted a moment at the office door. The voice was the voice of Brownlee, the defaulter, who had urged the manager ask Balfour during the day to meet him that night at the bank, and who had secreted himself in the building for the purpose of hearing what the manager had to say, and Fairbanks had bribed him to aid him in his dark deeds of wickedness, as will be seen later on.

The morning sun looked forth on a scene of the wildest confusion around the bank, and, in fact, all over the city, which was stirred to its centre. The bank manager was found, the morning following his discussion with Harry Balfour, murdered in his chair, stabbed to the heart by a dagger. On the dead man's desk the police found a silk handkerchief, and neatly worked on one corner was the unfortunate name, "H. Balfour." Beside the handkerchief they found a number of notes bearing the same name. With these facts in their possession the police felt it their duty to arrest Harry Balfour.

At the coroner's inquest which followed the prisoner could not give any satisfactory account of himself on the night of the murder, the reason being that when he left the bank he met an old friend, and both drank so freely that they were soon in a beastly state of intoxication. As to the handkerchief, he admitted that it was his, but could not conceive how it came to be found where it was, and the notes he said he knew nothing about whatever.

Drink had clouded his memory, and robbed memory of her power. He gave an account of his last interview with the late manager of the bank, but that story, as well as his pretended innocence about the forged notes, was not believed in the face of the other evidence against him.

Brownlee, the clerk, testified that he heard the manager tell the prisoner that he could

not afford to have a dishonest man in his employ, no matter what the consequences might be, and this, it was supposed, had reference to the forged notes, and he was supposed to be the forger.

The coroner's charge to the jury was strong against the prisoner, and when they had been out forty minutes they returned with a verdict of "willful murder;" and Harry Balfour was committed to stand his trial at the coming assizes for the awful crime.

The blow of disgrace fell on the members of Mr. Macdonald's family with fearful force, and particularly on the heart and head of his daughter. She had an unspeakable pity for her unfortunate lover, and she felt in her inmost soul that he was innocent.

"I must go and see him," she said to herself, as she sat in her own room, thinking the matter over. "Perhaps I can do something for him."

When she reached the goal where her lover was confined she found him sitting on the side of his cot in a most dejected condition, and as soon as they were alone she sprang to his arms and in broken sentences cried out:

"Oh, my poor, poor misguided and wronged Harry."

"My darling treasure," he said, "for myself I don't care so much, but for your sake I am suffering untold tortures; but, there now," he continued, noticing the painful expression on her face, "I must not add to your grief, which I know is already more than you can bear. The sun often shines though we see it not, and we must not forget that God reigns, and knows all, and that He will by no means clear the guilty." I have fallen—fallen disgracefully low; but, Jessie, these hands of mine, thank God, have never been stained with the blood of a fellow-being. "Wine, wine," in the bitterness of my life I feel it, "wine is a mocker; there is a curse in the cup, and now at the last it stings like a serpent and bites like an adder." Drink has brought all this upon me. I see it now. Canst thou forgive me?"

Thus the bitterness of remorse and sorrow wrung his soul, and he would have continued to accuse himself, but she stopped him and said:

"It is good, Harry, that your eyes should be opened, and I can quite believe that you feel your position keenly; but this is not the time nor place to discuss these things; we must find the murderer of your late employer. He has entrapped you for some dark purpose, and I am determined to find who he is and where he is. Do you know, Harry," she went on, "I have a strong suspicion of that scoundrel of a clerk, Brownlee. I did not like his look at the inquest, and I believe he knows more than he cares to tell. I intend to have him shadowed at any rate, and we shall see what comes from it."

"For God's sake, Jessie, take care of yourself, and don't expose yourself to peril on my account," said Harry, pleadingly.

"Never fear, I shall act carefully. But I must leave you now; here comes the officer."

One passionate kiss and a "good-bye, darling," and she was gone.

On her way home she saw a crowd of people looking into a shop window and she halted a second to see what they were looking at. As she did so her eye caught sight of Brownlee and Fairbanks just moving away from the window.

"I'll follow them," she said to herself, and lest they should notice her she threw around her the waterproof cloak she carried and taking a thick veil from her pocket she tied it around her face and kept the two men in sight. She met a gentleman on the way and, stopping a second, she whispered something in his ear and he ran off, saying, "All right."

The two men, after turning a corner, had eluded her, and, do her best, she could not discover them.

"Could they have known me?" she thought. "I'll go to their rooms."

And on she went, with but one thought and one desire, and that was—Harry must be saved.

When she reached the house she found the gentleman friend she had spoken to on the way and with him a city detective of first-class ability.

"Have they arrived?" she asked.

"No," was their short reply.

"I lost sight of them on the way. What shall we do?"

"They'll be here; let's get into the house before they come," said the detective. "We may learn something of interest."

By bribing the lady of the house they gained an entrance to the room occupied by Fairbanks, which was on the second floor.

The two men had scarcely got concealed behind a large wardrobe and taken up a position, when in came the three confederates, Fairbanks, Homer and Brownlee. Our heroine had crept into a closet used by the crooks for keeping wine in. It was the day after the inquest, and of course their minds were full of the subject. So when they got seated they began to talk freely of the affair.

"Old Ryonals is in Heaven by this time, I suppose," said Fairbanks.

"He may thank me who sent him there," replied Homer.

"And I who admitted you both into the bank," said Brownlee.

"Well, it was on that fool of a cashier Balfour's account that we did the deed," said Fairbanks, speaking excitedly—only for him I might have been married to old Macdonald's daughter. Never mind, he won't get her; I have sworn it."

"You have sworn a lie, murderer, and the rope you intended for a brave man's neck shall encircle your own!"

The speaker was Jessie Macdonald, and her words fell like a thunderbolt on the three men before her.

The detective and the gentleman who came with him covered the three rascals with the muzzles of three revolvers, and kept them pinned to the spot, while, by a peculiar whistle, the detective brought three burly policemen into the room, who handcuffed each criminal and escorted them to the police station.

When the trial came on Brownlee, to save his own miserable neck, turned Queen's evidence, and told the whole miserable scheme, the result of which was Homer paid the penalty of the law on the gallows, and Fairbanks was transported for life. Brownlee left the country and was never heard of afterwards, and poor Harry Balfour, who suffered so much, was liberated and restored to his brave little sweetheart, to their infinite joy and delight.

One word more about Fairbanks. Before he became a gambler he moved in the best of society, his family being wealthy and well connected. At that time Mr. Macdonald was among his most intimate acquaintances, and he was a frequent caller at the merchant's house.

He became charmed with the daughter of his friend, and being madly in love with the fair one, asked her to be his wife. She refused, and nothing could move her from this decision. He therefore retired, from the field in confusion, and being a bad man at heart, he hated her as fiercely as he had once loved her. Harry Balfour was therefore his successful rival, and when the rejected lover discovered that Balfour had become addicted to drink he thought he saw a chance for revenge on both his rival and his lost love. Hence the devilish plot we have just unfolded, and we already know how miserably that miscarried also.

Homer was led on in crime by Fairbanks in the hope of sharing the spoils, as was Brownlee, but their hopes were nipped in the bud, and their spoils the spoils of the criminal.

At the request of his sweetheart, Harry Balfour signed the pledge before he left the prison, and remained a total abstemious after. Mr. Macdonald's eyes were opened to the terrible effects of wine, and he banished it from his table and house. Six months after this Harry Balfour and Jessie Macdonald became one, and were as happy as mortals could be.

Is it necessary to point out the moral? Let me give you the hint in the words of the wise man—"Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup; at the last it shall be like a serpent and stingeth like an adder."

Happiness is a state of constant occupation upon some desirable object, with continual sense of progress toward its attainment.

All impatience of monotony, all weariness of best things even, are but signs of the eternity of our nature, the brokenness of fashions of the divine everlastingness.

The chief ingredients in the composition of these qualities that gain esteem and praise are good nature, truth, goodness and good breeding.

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