

THE RED, RED WINE:

A TEMPERANCE STORY.

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

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CHAPTER XXVI.—Continued.

Walter Bardsley listened for the happy chiming of the wedding-bells—he loved the bells of Netherborough—but they had suddenly become silent, strangely silent, and an awful stillness fell upon his own soul. He looked upon the face of his sister, Jennie, and read an unnamed horror there. Her face was as white as a shroud, and her dark, expressive eyes seemed to blaze upon him with apprehension and alarm. Then he remembered how his father and his brother had been slain by the insidious murderer whom he had now made friends with, and how, for generations, the same death-dealer had been the hereditary enemy of his house. He remembered how good old Aaron Brigham had bared his white head before him, and said, 'Walter Bardsley, will you stand firm?' and he had said, speaking as in the sight of God, 'I will!' And now—!

The after part of the proceedings interested him no more. In due time his young brother-in-law, Cuthbert Hayes, rose to respond to the toast of 'The Bridesmaids.' Young, handsome, ready-tongued, and witty, the stalwart Cuthbert looked every inch a man. He too, made a pleasant joke of Walter's prompt obedience to the wishes of his wife. 'He has given splendid hostage,' said he, 'for the loyalty of his love and devotion in leaping from his hobby at my sister's loving call. The young ladies, charming maidens every one of them, have seen and heard, and each in turn will exercise the sweet, decisive authority over their captive but honored and happy slaves. When that time comes—as the immortal Gilpin says, "May I be there to see."'

Yes, he looked a bright, brave youth that sunny autumn morning, did Cuthbert Hayes; but what meant the heightened color in his cheek? What meant the unnatural fire in his eye? What meant the little unsteadiness in his voice? And how was it that Dick Bardsley whispered to Mr. Dunwell, who sat near him,

'Bertie hasn't waited for his wife's orders on the subject. I'm afraid she will have to put the stopper on instead of drawing out the cork.'

And what, O what, made him laugh and wink as he said it, as though it was an amusing joke! Mr. Dunwell, let us give him credit for it, shook his head and sighed.

On the young bridegroom a great horror had fallen, a horror thickened in its darkness by the contemplation of Cuthbert's over-excited state. As soon as he decorously could he went out, and like sinning Peter, he wept bitterly. He was so deeply distressed that he became downright ill. He felt that his condition was such as must strike a chill through all the guests at the grand marriage feast. He tried to 'pull himself together,' and was alarmed and ashamed to find that it could not be done!

The guests had retired to the drawing-room. He stole away awhile from all. He was ill, miserable, desperate, self-condemned. Suddenly he rushed back to the forsaken feast, seized a half-empty champagne bottle, poured out a tumbler-full and drank it off, and then felt better, felt strong, felt manly; like his father-in-law, felt that he could hold up his head and defy the world! O wondrous power of alcohol to make the coward brave!

Now it so happened that the Reverend Daniel Dunwell had left his pocket handkerchief behind him when he left the breakfast-table. He returned to find it, and found also the bridegroom with the tumbler at his lips. Then did he sorrow that Dick Bardsley had

objected to Walter's drinking to the toasts in water. He said to himself, 'What a pity Dick interfered.' But he did not say, 'What a shame the young man's pastor did not help him to stand firmly to his guns!'

Then did the genial minister withdraw in silence, and, let us hope, with some degree of shame; but, why, oh why, did he not, there and then, lay his hand on his young friend's shoulder and say, 'Walter, for the love of God, get back to your first position and renew your vow? Why? Because his own attitude on the drink question demanded silence, silence even though doom and death were at the door.'

During the after part of the day, when Walter Bardsley and his happy wife had left for Scarborough, for at 'the queen of watering-places' they had decided to spend the honeymoon, Mr. Norwood Hayes and Mr. Dunwell were walking in the pretty park-like grounds of Throstle's Nest, enjoying each of them a post-prandial cigar. They were met by Jennie Bardsley, who was sauntering alone in self-communing spirit, with a deathly pallor, born of some great trouble-shock, upon her face.

Mr. Hayes, as usual, greeted her with smiling courtesy and a pleasant joke.

'Well, friend Jennie,' said he, 'of course, you expended a bag of rice and a slipper on the young folks as they went away?'

But Jennie was in no jesting mood just then. She stopped in the middle of the pathway, and like the Ancient Mariner, 'held them with her eye.'

'Mr. Hayes,' she said, 'what slew Reuben Stanford?'

'Nay, nay, do not call up things sorrowful to-day. It was strong drink, I suppose.'

He spoke a little brusquely for him, and would have passed on.

Mr. Dunwell, she asked again, in tones that might not be pooh-poohed, 'What was it that slew Farmer Stipson?'

'Strong drink, no doubt,' said the minister, who was always candid and straightforward.

'Yes,' she said, lifting her finger to give force to her strong words, and speaking as Deborah, the prophetess, might be supposed to do: 'Yes; and strong drink will slay Walter Bardsley; thanks to his pastor, and to him who has been his guide, philosopher, and friend.'

'Nonsense!' said Mr. Hayes, testily; 'no croaking on a wedding-day.' He spoke off-handish, but there was an unwonted frowning of his brow.

And what did the excellent pastor say?

Mr. Dunwell called to mind what he had seen in the dining-room that morning, and said, NOTHING!

CHAPTER XXVII.

While the merry wedding guests at Throstle's Nest—for it must not be supposed that Walter Bardsley's broken vow interfered at all with their delight—were celebrating the happy event by games and dance and song, our good old friend, and as I hope our favorite, Aaron Brigham, was quite otherwise engaged.

The old man had been invited; but Aaron could not be induced to accept the invitation.

'There isn't a soul i' Netherborough that wishes the young pair a better wish than I do, or that prays mair fervently that the good Lord will bless 'em, an' mak' 'em a blessing all the days o' their lives. But I'ae expectin' that you'll be hev'in' all sorts o' wine, an' champagne, an' sperrits upo' t' table. I can't be a party to ony sitch a mis-

erable start at t' beginnin' o' married life, Mr. Hayes; an' I'se a bit surprised that young Walter'll stand it. I think he wadn't if it was onywhere else; but he hez a notion that Mr. Norwood Hayes is aboot perfect an' can't mek a mistake. I trust an' pray he mayn't live to find oot that he's made one, an' that a dreadful big 'un. I'se sorry to say, No, Mr. Hayes; but I'se forced to respect my conscience, an' I can't go again it, no, not eaven for your sweet lassie, the bonnie bride. And, noo, hoo's Mrs. Hayes?'

The old man blushed like a school boy, old as he was, as soon as the words were spoken, for he had only intended a courteous inquiry, and, lo! he had aptly opened the closet where the skeleton at Throstle's Nest was kept. Mr. Hayes answered, rather shortly for him, that she was 'only poorly,' expressed his regret at the old man's refusal, and turned away.

Mr. Hayes was a good deal disturbed in mind. That last unintentional fling back of the closet door, made his standing ground a little shaky, and to him that was most unpleasent. He was constrained to turn back, for a helpful second-thought had come to him.

'I say, Aaron,' he said, 'I don't want to interfere too much with your prejudices, but I do think you might give way on this point. You may surely do what your Divine Master and mine thought it no harm to do. He was not only the Guest at a marriage feast where wine was provided, but he actually supplied them with abundance of it when the stock ran short. What can you say to that?'

'What can I say?' said Aaron, drily, 'why, I can say this, that if this was Galilee, an' Jesus was t' chief Guest, an' t' wine was t' same soort, an' t' best wine was made i' t' same way, an' He gav' orders to "serve it out," I might mebbe tek' some of it; but I don't believe that He wad wish me to drink, if I'd reither nut, an' I'se mair than sure that He wadn't ha' had it there at all if there was onybody there that was perillin' body an' soul by drinkin' it—I ax your pardon, Mr. Hayes, I do sincerely. I didn't mean to—'

He said no more, but stood with bowed head and blushing face, for he had 'put his foot in it' a second time, and Mr. Norwood Hayes had walked off towards Throstle's Nest at the rate of a good four miles an hour!

On the evening of the wedding-day, Aaron Brigham, as I have said, was otherwise engaged. On the morning of that day he had met George Caffer at the door of the church, just before the wedding party had arrived.

'Mornin', Aaron,' said the bibulous painter. 'Then you've come to see 'em worked off, ha' yo'? There'll be famous doin's at Throstle's Nest to-day. All t' toon'll hev a lively time on it. Ah've given myself a holiday. It's a poor heart that niver rejoices, an' I respect both t' bride an' bridegroom a good deal. Ah's bound to drink their varry good health. Ha' yo' seen owt o' Phil Lambert?'

'No, I ain't,' said the old man, sadly, for he perceived that painter and barber both, were about to give themselves up to a drunken spree. His heart was filled with pity for the poor sodden pair of toppers, and he longed with an eager longing to put them on a better track. He had prayed for them many a time and oft, and many a time and oft had expostulated with them, singly and together. While Caffer was telling him of his beery purpose, Aaron sighed a 'God help 'em!' and straightway a new idea, and a new hope, and a renewed purpose took possession of him.

(To be continued.)