

THE RED, RED WINE:

A TEMPERANCE STORY.

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

PUBLISHED BY PERMISSION OF
WILLIAM BRIGGS, TORONTO.

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)

This was followed by silence—the silence that is golden. Mr. Hayes spoke feelingly, and Jennie Bardsley felt its force.

It was a bright and lovely Sabbath morning. The soft and balmy breath of early autumn brought with it health and freshness, and Jennie Bardsley was easily persuaded to extend her walk to Alice's home on the Scanton Road. She knew that Walter was sure to be there, to help her home again if she needed it. Mr. Dunwell had elected to saunter in the same direction with his two younger children, whose enjoyment of 'a walk with papa' could hardly be expressed in words.

Of course, these also must cross Mr. Norwood Hayes' hospitable threshold. Mrs. Hayes had 'one of her headaches' that morning: that, at least, was Alice's way of accounting for her non-appearance. The truth was that she was laid upon what she called her 'couch of weakness' in a small parlor off the drawing-room, in silent rebellion against prohibition principles, and trying to pass the weary hours on a mental diet of trashy novels.

Alice, of course, had to act as hostess. Jennie Bardsley was content to take a biscuit and a glass of water; the wants of Mr. Dunwell's bonnie children were met by a slice or two of cake, or better still, a cheese-cake with currants in; and to restore Mr. Dunwell's exhausted energies, after his arduous morning labors, the resources of the sherry decanters were offered and accepted.

Of course, Miss Alice could not leave her papa neglected. His diaconal responsibilities were only second to those of the pastor himself.

'What will you take, papa?' said the waiting handmaid, not at all in a whisper, or even in 'softened tones and voice subdued,' though her mother, the victim of sumptuary laws, was quite within hearing.

'O, I don't mind, my dear,' was Mr. Norwood Hayes' response.

'O, no, that won't do,' said Mr. Dunwell. 'You must not leave me to sip my wine alone. Take a glass of sherry with me, at least for company.'

'O, well, so be it,' said Mr. Hayes.

In a little while an addition is made to the little group. Farmer Stipson, of Scanton Grange, was not only a good customer, but a recognized acquaintance, and according to Mr. Hayes, was 'one of the best fellows going, and if he only had religion to give himself control, would be a splendid soul.'

'Good morning,' said the farmer, as he entered the room, making an inclusive bow to all and sundry, and proceeding at once to 'business.'

'I say, Hayes, I just want a word with you about that new threshing machine. I was riding by—I've got a young horse in training—and I thought this will save me a journey to-morrow. Will you take my offer?'

'Excuse me, Mr. Stipson,' said Mr. Hayes, 'I never transact business on a Sunday.'

'O, nonsense,' said Stipson, with a short laugh. 'I'm not going to pay you money to-day, or ought o' that sort. Just a word 'll settle the thing, you know.'

'It's the Lord's Day,' said Mr. Hayes, seriously and reverentially. 'And I honor the fourth commandment, as indeed I would seek to honor the whole ten, and I cannot speak to you on that subject. Business to-morrow, if you please, and as much of it as you please.'

The farmer rose; he was a little nettled, evidently, and was willing to leave without further speech on the subject.

'I'll ride over to the Grange first thing in the morning,' said Mr. Hayes, as a second thought. 'You won't lose any time then.'

'O, well,' said Stipson, still a little sore, and

speaking a little gruffly, 'that may do, but I can't understand your scruples—'

'Never mind it, now it's settled,' said the deacon, naturally anxious to conciliate a very valuable client of his firm. 'Here, have a glass of sherry before you go.'

'No, thank you,' said Stipson, speaking frankly and brusquely as was usual with him. 'I've been overrunning the constable lately, and must pull up a bit.'

'O well,' said Mr. Hayes, thinking of nothing at that moment but the desirability of putting the farmer into good feeling after his rebuff. Such a purchase as the one in hand meant large profits, and who can blame the shrewd man of business for trying to secure them? 'A glass won't harm you. It will give an edge to your appetite for dinner.' Then nodding towards Mr. Dunwell, pastor of Zion chapel, he added, 'You can't do better than follow a good example.'

'Very well,' said Stipson, resuming his seat, 'anything to oblige,' and tipping down the sherry at a gulp, he handed the empty glass to be refilled.

Anything to oblige! Even the risk of body and soul. A second glass he was content to sip more leisurely, and he became more conversational and at home.

'I'm glad,' said he, turning to the pastor of Zion's, 'that you aren't one of them namby-pamby teetotalers, Parson Dunwell, I can't abide 'em.'

'No,' said the pastor, not particularly happy to have the compliment from that quarter, and taking up his hat as he saw Stipson's glass again empty. 'I prefer to let my moderation be known unto all men.'

Mr. Stipson, too, went forth from Mr. Norwood Hayes' most hospitable roof, mounted the young horse he was training, and turned his steps, not homeward, as he first intended, but towards Netherborough—they kept splendid sherry at the 'Griffin.'

CHAPTER XIX.

When Farmer Stipson arrived at the 'Griffin,' he found the private bar already occupied by some half-dozen habitués, who had come to obtain their usual Sunday morning dram, as the fitting finish to their Sunday morning stroll, and the equally fitting preparation for their Sunday dinner. After dinner, they will need a further dram as 'a digestive.'

'Good morning, Stipson. Why, we thought we'd lost you. You haven't been here for a month o' Sundays. What will you take?'

The speaker was Dick Bardsley, the brother of young Walter Bardsley, and the champion of champagne at the great Netherborough fete.

'Morning,' said Stipson, in his usual gruff and rough-and-ready fashion—just now, perhaps, more gruff than ordinary. 'No, I haven't. The fact is, I haven't any business to be here now.'

Farmer Stipson was not in a good temper. He was vexed with himself. He inwardly cursed himself for a fool, and he had another silent curse to spare for Pastor Dunwell, and another for Mr. Norwood Hayes, the two men who had been the means of his coming there. He felt like taking vengeance on himself for breaking his resolve. He knew that he was now committed to another drinking bout, which in all probability would be longer and heavier, because of the interval since his last indulgence. Yet, even now, had there been a restraining hand, and a kindly, deterring voice to aid him, he might have made his escape.

'Nonsense, man,' quoth Dr. Medway, who, having finished his morning round among his patients, found a change, after dispensing healing medicines to others, to mixing deleterious doses for himself.

'Sit you down. Here, waiter, bring us a pint of sherry. I'll pay the piper. Stipson.

you're below par, my good fellow, and that's the medicine I prescribe for you.'

'There, now! That's something like a prescription, that is. Doctor, I feel a little below par myself. Just pass the dose.' The speaker this time was Lawyer Everett, Witty Everett, they called him.'

This piece of taproom humor was greeted with general laughter, in which Stipson joined. That was the little oil in which he slid down into acquiescence with his fate. He drank the sherry, which Medway ostentatiously placed within his reach. O, poor wife and mother, watching at the farmyard gate with anxious face and shaded eyes, cease your gazing, George will not come to-day!

The conversation in the bar-parlor soon turned on politics. This is a topic held in much favor by toppers in general, and by toper-makers—brewers, publicans, etc., in particular. This may help to account for the beery and blundering character of the legislation with which this long-suffering land has been afflicted. It is a thing to thank God for that the principles of temperance and sobriety are fast permeating the councils and the councillors of the nation, and that the vicious element, strong drink, as a factor in English politics is a rapidly diminishing quantity.

Now politics is a topic that has a good deal of tinder in it; and sherry, especially in its energetically doctored condition, is replete with latent combustible forces.

Lawyer Everett, as was natural, could take any side; and could defend that in which he did not believe quite as forcibly as that to which he had pledged his vote. In the bar-room of the 'Griffin,' that day, he took it into his head to be a Liberal. Farmer Stipson, like most farmers of the old school, was a stubborn Conservative. He was a strong and active partisan, and a choleric one. He was soon roused into a condition of feeling, in which he lost his self-control. In this state he began to call for his own supplies of liquor; drinking without knowing it, and rapidly reducing himself to a condition of absolute incapability.

One by one his 'friends,' becoming aware of his state, took occasion to retire. And so it came to pass that before the bells of Netherborough called the burghers to afternoon service in the church, he fell asleep, rolled helplessly over, and lay like a log upon the parlor floor.

Thus he lay until Marvell, the landlord, appeared upon the scene. He knew his customer of old, and had him carried, as he had done many a time before, into a musty, comfortless, private parlor, for the most part unused, and placing him in a big, old-fashioned, and comfortless settee, shut the door upon him, and left him to sleep off the effects of the extravagant measure of liquors he had imbibed.

So the Sabbath afternoon wore slowly on. The 'Griffin,' the 'Netherborough Arms,' and all the more reputable 'publics' enjoyed a season of comparative quiet, until the evening hours should fill tap-room and bar with bibulous life again.

When the shades of evening were gathered round, the miserable Stipson came to be partially himself again. For awhile he failed to realize where he was, or what had happened to him. Then the whole horrible business of that Sabbath morning came back to mind and memory like a lightning stroke. He felt a strange sensation, as of a blow upon the head, a fainting, sinking feeling, as if he were sliding down. An unspeakable despair got hold upon him; a conviction that was strong as certainty that his last chance was gone; that he could never, never, never again even try to elude the grasp of the demon that had gripped his soul and life!

(To be Continued.)