

THE MESSENGER.

Cyril's Trouble.

(By Catherine Shaw.)

'Why, what is my darling crying for?'

But sobs were the only answer. So she took her boy up and clasped him to her with a certain nameless sinking at her heart when she felt his arms close round her neck convulsively, with still no reply but those raining tears.

'Has any one hurt you? What is it, Cyril?' she asked again and again.

But Cyril shook his head at every question, and squeezed her the tighter.

His young mother was greatly disturbed. She had only just come home from a week's visit in the country, at the house where she had first met her husband; and though she had hesitated at leaving her darling, she had been laughed out of her fears. 'Surely two nurses were enough to take care of one little boy!' they had said.

She had come home now, and Cyril had burst into tears when he had seen her, and could give no explanation.

She sat down on her sofa and fondled him tenderly, urging him by every endearment to tell her what was the matter.

How she longed for her absent husband! how she wished the months were over which must elapse before they were to join him in India!

Meanwhile, Cyril's sobs grew less, and at length he lay with his little face hidden in her neck, as if he would never raise it again.

'Can you tell mother now, Cyril?' she asked softly.

'I'm afraid to,' he whispered.

'Who are you afraid of, precious?'

'Nurse would not like it,—nor wouldn't you, mo'ver!'

'But I would rather know anything that troubles you, Cyril. I shall not be angry, even if you have been naughty.'

'I haven't,' said Cyril, his voice fading again to a faint whisper. 'It was one day, nurse had some one to tea— Oh, I can't tell you—'

'Do, darling,' urged his mother, earnestly.

'They were talking—I was in bed with the door open—p'raps they thought I was asleep, but I wasn't. The girl that came told nurse that you—you, mother—wouldn't be

happy if you went to see those people down in the country—'

'Why?' asked his mother in a low tone. Her heart thumped against her side as if it would burst. Did she guess the reason?

'I couldn't understand, but the girl said,—and she laughed dreadfully when she said it,—"She'd better wear a bit of blue ribbon if she goes there, for I've been parlormaid there, and they all drink ever so much wine!"'

Cyril's mother felt choking. 'Well?' she murmured.

'That's all,' he whispered. 'Then they talked so low that I couldn't hear; but oh, mo'ver, you will take



a bit of blue ribbon next time, won't you?'

His beseeching, broken-hearted little tone!

'I'll never go there again, Cyril,' she said, solemnly.

The child gave her a closer hug.

'Then you are not angry, mo'ver?'

'No—no, my precious—I only love you more than ever.'

'What did they mean, mo'ver?'

'I do not know all, Cyril, but I see some of it. Mother, at any rate, will not take any more of their wine. I see it all now. Oh, Cyril, if you could guess how sorry I am!'

No, Cyril could not guess. His little hand had unwittingly touched a hidden temptation which lies in many a young path.

'What's the harm of a glass?'

Cyril's father had said many a time; and yet sixty thousand drunkards fall over the precipice every year; and sixty thousand more are slowly, surely walking forward to take their places at the edge to fall over, too.

Young men in the city, tired and thirsty, why do you go out for your glass, if this is the end of it?

Young women in shops and factories and bars, overworked and underfed, why do you take your glass, if this is the end of it?

Fashionable young men—where will you stop?

Mothers, sisters, in the higher classes, will you not take warning ere it is too late?

Cyril's mother thought these thoughts as she lay on her sofa still clasping her little son in her arms. What if any act of hers should separate her from her darling? What if the glass which ruined thousands of other women, should ruin her!

She could not believe it—and yet—if it were possible?

'Cyril, Cyril!' she whispered, 'let us ask God to help us all—father, and you and me—to keep his commandments always, and to please him in everything for Jesus Christ's sake!'

She rose from the couch, and sank on to her knees with the child's arms still clasping her neck.

Her maid thought her mistress very grave that afternoon when she came to dress her, and was surprised that the glass of wine she brought with her remained untouched.

When Cyril came down for the short time he was generally with her before dinner, he seemed to be very anxious for his nurse to disappear and shut the door.

When he was quite sure she was gone, he bounded to his mother's side.

'Here's a bit of blue ribbon off my little Japanese dolly,' he said, fumbling at her dress with his inexperienced little fingers, while she hindered him very much by kissing them all the while.

'You think that will help me to keep my promise, Cyril?' she asked softly.

'Will it?' he said doubtfully. 'She said so!'

'I have promised God and my husband,' she said solemnly, putting her hand on her freshly-written letter; 'but I will wear that for your sake, Cyril!—Our Darlings.'