

their doings to you, who visit at the Ellery farm so often."

"Ned does not seem deceitful."  
"He is not, but he is secretive and reserved. He likes you and wants your good opinion; he would not lie to you, perhaps, but he will show you his better side. How does he keep up his studies?"

"Fairly well," said Billy, who, even as he replied, feared his qualified "well" was not quite as near the truth as "not at all well" would have been.

"Nevertheless, he is on the down grade, and I want you to see if he can't be brought to know it in time. He has got a grand little mother who expects he is going to make her proud and happy all the days of her life. Just you corner him some day and talk to him like a Dutch uncle. I've had my eye on him this long time; but he knows it, and I can't catch him. When I do he'll get a shaking up. That will be for only once, however. What you can do is to watch and work right along, now while you are together. Oh thunder! If there isn't that plaster that ought to have been on Jerusha Peters' back twenty-four hours ago! Take it to her, and run when she gets it, or she will scold a blue streak as long as you will stand and listen."

Billy did as he was bidden, revolving in his mind the doctor's words in regard to Ned. He recalled little things that now seemed to have some significance. Several times Ned had been away all night when Billy had supposed he was at home.

The rules regulating the life of the "upper story boys," were very few and not stringent. They must be in the building at school hours; must behave when there; must come home at a certain hour at night, if they came at all. It was a common occurrence for one to go home, if his home was near town, and to remain there over night. Billy had sometimes wondered why Ned was always irritable, moody, and half sick, after his visits, or what he supposed were such; at least, it had been so with him for many months. There had been a time when he used to tell Billy what he had done, whom he had seen, or what had happened at the old homestead. He rarely did this now—days; yet when he had undeniably been home for a visit, he brought back some tangible proof of it, and was not cross or moody. He had become a great beer drinker, and this he admitted frankly, turning off with jest, Billy's frequent comments on the habit. About mid-winter, he had declared that the pastor of the First Church, of which he was a member, was dull and behind the times. From random remarks on the subject, Billy had supposed he was attending church elsewhere, but this supposition might be without foundation.

For several days after Dr. Higbee had talked with him, Billy was not in his room at the same time with Ned; but one evening about ten o'clock, the two found themselves together. Each had lessons to prepare, and so studied in silence for a while; then Billy, finishing his task, looked up to see Ned absorbed in gloomy thought.

"I say, Knox," he exclaimed, abruptly, "relatives are great blessings, no doubt; but, in some respects, a chap like you, who is all there is of the family, is to be congratulated. You have no anxious friends to overrate your ability, and to be tremendously disappointed if you fizzle all out. That's the contrariety of fortune, though; you, who have no dotting aunts or generous old grandfathers, or blessed good mother—you will improve each shining hour, and make an out-and-out success of yourself."

"Are you making out your programme for a 'fizzle'?"

"I am not making out any programme at all; others have done it, and that is the bother. The fizzle will be accomplished without preparation."

"What do you mean?"

"My mother expects me to be a minister. Think of it!"

Ned gave a long, low laugh, which was rather scornful than merry. As Billy said nothing, he added: "When I was a little fellow I had a sort of juvenile piety—ministers' children often have it early and recover—I talked about being like my father, and that settled the matter of my future."

"Have you lost all your religion?"

"Did you ever see any in my possession?" No harried or wholly indifferent person ever spoke so bitterly of himself as did Ned then, in tone if not in words. Billy push-

ed away his books, and coming near, said, warmly:

"If you had paraded your religion I should not have believed much in you. The main thing with me was whether you acted from good principles."

"My principles are excellent; my practice is variegated—highly so."

Billy flung his arm about Ned's shoulders, and giving him a friendly shake, asked sympathetically: "What are you about now-days? I may not be a 'dotting' friend, but I like you. I want to know why you think you may be a fizzle?"

"I shall not be ready for college—at least to enter as I expected. I have got into debt; not very badly, but for a fellow in the Academy it will be considered useless, and altogether bad."

"What sort of debt?"

"Oh, I borrowed money once or twice of Stan Ellery, and once or twice of a friend of his—a mean scawlag he is, too. I lost it all, of course."

"Gambling?"

"Well, it amounted to that, I suppose. The fact is, Knox, I have been going it pretty fast this winter. I have only myself to blame. I wanted to try a few things; but if Stan Ellery had not stuck to me, I might have slackened up somewhat."

"Shake free from him, Ned! Do it once and for all, and he'll let you alone. I know Stan; he will drag you into the mire, then wade through and out, leaving you to sink, or take care of yourself."

"He wallows in some ditches I never stepped into yet," returned Ned, emphatically.

"Very likely," assented Billy, adding: "but surely, you can easily give him up."

"I might—yes—but what if there was something else I could not easily give up?"

"There was no reason that Billy should think of Ned, or any sense in supposing that Ned was thinking of her; but it was with a sudden relief that Billy heard his companion say:

"You don't approve of my drinking beer so often?"

"No, it is a useless habit. I don't like to think you are so fond of it, and I don't believe that you need it."

"I am fond of it, but I will tell you what I like better," said Ned, grimly; and in the lamplight, his face suddenly flushed with shame. Some friendly instinct made Billy whisper, as he hesitated:

"You can trust me, old fellow!"

"Well, I like brandy—whiskey—rum, or anything of that sort, better than beer! I would like a drink this very minute I knew you would look horrified, but it is the simple truth. A drinking man disgusts me; the name of drunkard sounds as ugly as ever—but I have got the love of drink in me. What do you think of that, for a boy not yet in college, and a future minister!"

"I think it is bad enough; but because you are a boy, and know the danger, the mischief can be stopped in time. You can cut yourself off from the outside temptations easily enough, can't you?"

"Perhaps," said Ned, moodily.

"The hankering for stimulant you must fight."

"I ought to, but I shall not."

"Haven't you any pluck?" cried Billy, with sudden vehemence.

"No—not much on such lines. I could knock even you down, it may be, if I was pretty mad; but I always do what I want to do, no matter how often I resolve not to give way. I am morally weak, and I know it."

"But don't you realize that you must take yourself in hand at once, Ned?"

"I realize I won't—or can't—or shall not."

There was something morbid in this moral languor of a fellow so gifted intellectually, and so well instructed spiritually. Billy's bolder, braver nature was stirred to arouse the other one to resolution, to action; but what appeal should he make that could avail? Fenton was, in truth, miserably self-indulgent.

"Ned, can't you, by one mighty effort, will to do right?"

"Yes, and then, by many un-willings, do wrong."

"But you will wreck your own boat before it is fairly launched."

"I know it."

The young fellow sat bent, his face between his hands; while Billy, too excited to keep quiet any longer, strode up and down the room. By-and-by the latter's steps grew slower, and he halted in deep thought;

then again he came near to his companion, and speaking with visible effort, said:

"Last September, Ned, I began to pray, and now I believe in prayer. I accepted as true, to and for me, what I had always been told; that God for Christ's sake would forgive sins—that in life, my life, I could have help from heaven. I believe it all, for I have prayed, and my prayers have had answers. Now, the Bible plainly says God will give us help, strength, or wisdom, to the uttermost, if we are in dead earnest about wanting and seeking. I never yet have had a great struggle or a great temptation—at least, not any like this that has come on you; and so I can't tell you what I have learned by experience—but Christians do say, Ned, they can always conquer, through Christ that strengthens them. Doesn't your own mother say that?"

"My mother would die if she knew me as I really am—she calls me her 'good son,'" said Ned, the big tears rushing to his eyes. He was a tender-hearted boy, after all, and Billy's previous words had touched him deeply. He knew that when he himself was studying his Bible on his father's knee, Billy must have been a homeless, fatherless waif. The older Billy had always seemed to him like an honest young giant; strong, clean-tongued, but without much sentiment of any sort. To-night he revealed himself to Ned as tender and reverent, as having entered a purer, better atmosphere. Won by his sympathy, Ned now confessed, as he might have done to a brother, all the error and waywardness of the past months. It was all worse than Billy's worst fancies; but he talked them both good, if for no other reason than that it renewed Ned's waning faith in another's rectitude; and it awakened in Billy a hearty, brotherly affection, as well as a half fear, half gladness, that, in a sense, he was his brother's keeper. From that time on, during the winter, he tried, by every means in his power, to stimulate Ned's healthier impulses, and to shield him from temptations. He prevailed on him to renew his former habits of thorough study, and urged his going home when he would not otherwise have gone. He was sure Ned would not seek out Stan Ellery, and because he never encountered the latter in their room after that night's conversation, he trusted that the old spell was broken.

It had been Billy's habit to spend some part of his time between each Friday night and Monday morning, at the farm. Mrs. Ellery urged this on him, and he was only too happy to avail himself of her hospitality. Nan was usually at home, and this fact was no drawback to his enjoyment. The young girl snubbed him frequently, and criticised him freely; but then again, she talked with him, long at a time, of her school, her friends and the thousand and one interests of her bright young life.

About the time of Prissy's wedding, Nan began to treat Billy rather coolly, or, at least, with a new formality and reserve. He noticed it at once, and felt it keenly; puzzling much whether it meant dislike, disdain, or a cold-blooded recognition of the fact, that their social relations must, for the future, be re-arranged, and that on a new basis. He was inclined to think this last was the true explanation.

Ned Fenton, when once introduced by Stan Ellery into the little circle of Nan's school-friends, had become very popular. Nan herself often spoke of him as being so "witty, so entertaining in conversation, and such a gentleman by birth and breeding." Billy always heartily agreed with her, while he winced inwardly at something he fancied implied in this last phrase. Would Nan ever have any great approval for a man, totally unlike Ned; not graceful, not white-handed, not always sure of the neatest way of doing, saying, and handling everything—only a fellow with a clear head, a big heart, and a conscience kept in good repair?

After the interview with Ned Fenton, Billy spent more of his spare time with him, and several Saturdays, when he would otherwise have been at the farm, he attached himself to Fenton. Once Fenton went with him to the Ellerys for the day; a number of young people having been invited to the farm for a kind of informal merry-making. Ned had been doing remarkably well in his studies for a few weeks, and was in unusually high spirits.

"Any mother must be proud of that bright, handsome fellow," said Mrs. Ellery to Billy, during the day.

"And he is as good as he looks," exclaimed

Sara Wells, adding; "he is going to be a minister, I hear."

"Is he, Billy?" asked Nan, musingly.

"His people have hoped he would be one; that is a long way ahead," was the reply.

"He is wise. If I were a young man I would choose a profession," was Nan's comment.

As Ned joined them that moment, and Billy saw the cordial hearing Nan gave to his every gay remark, he felt a strange discomfort. He said to himself that they were all three of them too young for "non-sense." Some day he, Billy Knox, might be thinking of a wife; just now, what was it to him that Nan Ellery was as fresh and sweet as a crisp pink rose bud? But why had not Ned Fenton just as good a right to think this of his own, as he had to consider it an original discovery? Not once did it occur to him that he had it in his power to injure Ned in the eyes of any who thought him better and stronger than Billy knew him to be. Later in the day when the party came to an end, Ned and Billy rode back to town together. On the way Ned, who had been whistling softly to himself forgetful of his companion, stopped, saying: "Miss Ellery is a charming girl—as soft and as frolicsome as a kitten, and as able to scratch you in the prettiest fashion possible, if she feels like it."

Billy said something not intelligible.

"I have seen a great deal of her at the skating rink, and at one place and another, this winter. Stan has let me do his duty as her escort, when he had what he considered more exciting amusement. She is quite exciting enough for me."

Billy had nothing to say, whatever he might have thought, so Ned went on: "If I were what I ought to be—a model young student—I would surely follow her up until she promised to wait and marry me some fine day; but, you see, I can't count on myself."

"Then you had better let her alone."

"I know it, but I like her, and it pleases me to show her I do."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Billy, hotly.

"I suppose so—on very many accounts."

"Her parents consider her a child."

"Well, she is not; but I don't intend to ask for her so long as I am not of age, and my grandfather is paying my school-bills, and nobody knows who is going to pay some others."

"You are not good enough now, for Nan Ellery, and I don't think you ever will be," persisted Billy.

"Well, you are honest, and maybe you are right," returned Ned, lazily; adding, with more animation in a moment; "She likes me pretty well, anyway."

The rest of the ride was taken in silence.

(To be continued.)

#### HER BROTHER.

A handsome, stately youth of sixteen years passed one day through the playground of a public school.

"There goes brother Robert," called out a little girl in the midst of a group of scholars. "Isn't he handsome?"

"Why? Why?" cried out several voices at once.

"Oh, he is so good! He never swears nor chews nor smokes tobacco, neither does he ever drink any liquor. I am so glad that I have such a brother."

The children all looked again with admiration upon the youth, when one of them earnestly remarked, "I hope my brother will be like him."

The next day two young men in a buggy drove rapidly past the same children. One of them had a cigar stump in his mouth, and he was so drunk that he could scarcely sit up. As the buggy went by the children, they heard him utter a terrible oath.

"That is Will Burton," said one of the children; "he tends in a saloon, and he is drunk the greater part of his time. I would be ashamed to have such a brother."

None of them noticed that a little girl ran away and hid herself. In a few minutes her playmates missed her and hunted for her. They soon found her weeping and sobbing as if her heart would break. She refused to tell the cause of her trouble; but it was clear to all of them, as a little girl whispered to another, "That drunken boy was her brother."

Boys, see that your actions and lives may be so that your sisters may be proud of you. Never give them any cause to be ashamed of you.—Words of Cheer.