



How Aunt Millie Learned 'Why Not?'

(Mrs. A. H. Bronson in the 'Standard'.)

A pleasant little party had gathered to take tea with dear old Aunt Millie in her quaint, old-fashioned parlor. It was full of old-time relics; choice bits of china ornamented the narrow mantel, and pictures telling of the time when photographs or even ambrotypes were yet unknown. Shadows of dear faces cut out, with here and there an oil painting, rare and precious. 'My grandfather and his two brothers who fought in the revolutionary war, my dears,' the old lady would say, proudly. 'And this is my grandmother,' glancing at a stately lady in stiff ruffles and powdered hair, and then a deep sigh followed, as she slowly and almost reluctantly took carefully from a drawer in an ancient mahogany writing-desk two lovely paintings on ivory, 'My own dear father and mother;' and then, after a moment's hesitation, another, 'My dear husband and our little son, united in their lives and in their deaths not divided,' written beneath in the finest of fine characters, as distinct as print. 'Why, how could that be, I wonder,' cried Sue, the youngest of the three, who now for the first time were visiting their great aunt, in such a gay, modern tone, that the others looked daggers at her, and with thoughtful Ella, whose guests they were for the summer, shuddered.

'I cannot explain it now, dears,' she said very gently, 'Ella knows, and she may tell you sometime, but we want everything cheerful to-night,' and, taking the cherished mementoes and slipping them into their velvet cases, she carefully replaced them in the drawer and locked the desk. Then, ringing a tiny silver bell, the signal for the 'tea' to be brought, she motioned them to be seated at a round and much-carved mahogany table, while Betty, the faithful old servant, placed the dainty dishes upon it. Soon they were eating and drinking with as much zest as if sorrow and care never could touch their young hearts. All but Aunt Millie, who, while she anxiously attended to their wants and answered their eager questions as to this or that ancient cup or bowl, and Ella, who sat next her and skilfully led the conversation to the lightest topics, scarcely touched the delicate though satisfying viands.

'What a lovely wine-glass,' exclaimed Alice, taking up a fragile bit of cut glass, which did duty as a vase for a stem of white roses. 'Auntie, why can't we finish up this festive occasion by pledging you in the social glass? Just a tiny bit, you know, it would look so lovely, and—' Here Alice stopped, for Ella was holding Aunt Millie from falling, and the other girls sprang to her aid. 'Hush,' said Ella, 'she is coming to; call Betty; we will lay her on the lounge, there!' Then signing to the terrified company to leave the room, she proceeded to loosen the dress and apply the usual restoratives.

Before long she joined them on the veranda. 'Will you go directly home,' she said, hurriedly, 'and send mother at once; the doctor has been sent for and will soon be here. I must stay till mamma comes, and then I will join you,' and she hurried back to the sick room. Ere long they were sitting quietly in their friend's own room, for they were too disturbed to remain in the parlor, and waiting in tearful silence for her return.

Her first look reassured them. 'Good news, my dears,' she said, dropping into the nearest chair. 'She is doing well, the doctor says, and will soon be sleeping quietly.'

And now, I will tell you the story of the pictures, for that will best explain the sudden attack. I blame myself,' she went on, 'for not being more careful; I had indeed forgotten that this was the anniversary of the terrible experience which made her in one hour a widow and childless, or I should not have taken you there to-day. I noticed her excitement as soon as she took out the pictures—though she tried hard to control it. I am so sorry!'

When Aunt Millie was first married, she was surprised to find that her husband never drank wine, not even at the dinner table with guests present. She sometimes rallied him on his 'peculiar habit,' as she called it, for you must remember that this was before the time of the temperance or rather the total abstinence agitation, when wine and often stronger liquors were used at gentlemen's tables as regularly as soup and meat, with no thought of danger or harm. She was, therefore, not only surprised but almost if not quite mortified that he did not take his glass with the other gentlemen. The day when they were discussing arrangements for a dinner party to be given in honor of their little son's first birthday, she spoke of it with some earnestness, and again asked him why he never took it.

He looked earnestly at her for a moment, his face very pale as he said, 'Millie, I do not dare. I am afraid to taste a single drop.'

'Afraid!' she exclaimed, 'my husband afraid to trust himself with a little glass of wine?'

Then she changed her tone as if sudden light had burst upon her. 'Oh, I think I know how it is,' she said, 'you are very sensitive, and perhaps it seems to affect you more than it really does. I remember that brother Joe had to be careful, or mamma for him, that he did not take a second glass; it made him, well, rather free and forward, you know,' and she smiled as if recalling some ludicrous instance, 'but he was easily excited always, would fly into fits of passion, but you, my strong-minded husband, you could never forget yourself; come, let me put your name down for the first toast for our little son's health and long life?'

There was no answer, only a look full of sadness as he arose and left the room.

If he had answered her, if he had told her 'why' just then and there all might have been different. The dinner was given; friends near and dear, some distinguished strangers, many well-wishers were present, and at the close the little son and heir was brought in. Donald, pale but firm, proposed his health, lifted his glass, put it down, then, as he caught his wife's eye fixed upon him in entreaty, raised and drained it, filled it again, and when the ladies left the table, there were some anxious glances cast upon the now excited host, but not by his wife.

'Didn't Don do splendidly to-night?' she whispered to her friend, Miss Mary. 'I knew I could cure him of his fanatical notions about wine. I'll have a good laugh at him by-and-by.'

This was the beginning; alas! not the end. The appetite so long and so bravely kept in check only by total abstinence, once more asserted itself in full power. No need now for his wife to urge the wine upon him. Her care was to keep him from it. One day he had been out driving with a friend, and had stopped at their club for 'refreshments.' Just as the gentleman alighted from the light buggy, the nurse came down stairs with little Don dressed for his daily outing.

'Here, give my boy to me,' he cried, 'he shall have a ride with his papa.'

The nurse hesitated and even attempted to retreat, fearing danger, but Donald, seizing the child, attempted to spring into the carriage with him in his arms. The whip which he still held, touched the horse, who jumped forward, reared and plunged, and father and son were thrown to the ground, the carriage passing over them. When taken up baby Don was dead, his father only breathing. 'Indeed, love, I do not dare to taste it, even,' came from his lips, and all was still. Of course, Aunt Millie was crazed with grief. For weeks her life was despaired of, but she rallied, and, as you know, has devoted her lonely life to 'helping and saving,' how many no one can know. She regained some of her cheerfulness after a time, but has had returns of the prostration which overcame her at first, when the anniversary comes, or anything occurs to bring it especially to mind.

'Oh, girls, can she ever forgive me?' sobbed poor Alice. 'I'm afraid I've killed her!'

'No, not this time,' said Ella, kindly, 'and if it is the means of making us all more careful in future, I am sure we shall have little cause to regret this sad ending of our visit, and that she, dear soul, will rejoice even in it.'

'More careful!' burst out Alice, wiping away a fresh shower from her eyes. 'I will never again so much as look at a glass of wine, even if it is right under my eyes, and as for asking anyone to drink it, I think I'll die first!'

'Amen,' said Ella, solemnly, and all the girls whispered it after her.

Tobacco Habit Among the Young.

Of late years juvenile smoking has been spreading like an epidemic in all countries of the world, and is attacking both the physical and moral health of nations. In France, in Germany, and in this country efforts have been made to check its further inroads. In some parts of Germany, as also in portions of the United States, laws have been enacted prohibiting persons under the age of eighteen from smoking, and rendering it a punishable offense for anyone to give or sell tobacco to children. In France numerous societies have been formed for the suppression of the vice.

In no country has this habit increased with the young to a greater extent than in England. The advent of the cheap cigarette is doubtless chiefly responsible for this condition of affairs. To see boys of seven or eight years old puffing their cigarettes is quite a common occurrence in London, and particularly in this case in the East End. However, when a packet containing five cigarettes can be bought for two cents, the fact that smoking has become so general can scarcely be wondered at. Sir William Harcourt, in his last speech on the budget, referred to the large increase of revenue received from tobacco, in these words: 'I believe it is mainly due to the great increase in the consumption of cigarettes, which are especially attractive to our youthful population.' He added: 'I am told of one manufacturer who makes two million cigarettes a day who hardly made any a few years ago.'

It has been proposed in Great Britain, as a remedy for the evil, that the members of the medical profession should make a move in the matter, and urge on the managers of schools the importance of special teaching and exposing the harmfulness of juvenile smoking, and should also make such representations to Parliament and the Government as might lead to efficient legislation. It is difficult to see in what manner this vice can be checked among children unless by repressive measures. If the medical profession in this country were to exert themselves with a similar object in view the habit might be yet stopped.—'Pediatrics.'

Teaching His Boy to Drink.

In the early hours of a spring morning, while journeying on a railway train to an appointed service, I found, as fellow-travelers in the two seats in front of the one I occupied, an elderly woman, presumably the grandmother of a little fellow of not more than two summers, who sat with her, while behind them were the parents of the boy.

We were nearing the end of the journey as the man took a flask from his pocket, drank from it, and passed it to the old woman, who drank too. Then the father, taking the flask again, offered it to the little lad, who was urged to 'have a nip' with the rest, which he did.

I quailed at the sight, and then my blood grew warm with indignation as I thought of what the father had deliberately done—pressed the 'cup of death' to the lips of his first-born, and he so young!

How my inmost being cried out for some restraining hand to make forever impossible the repetition of an offence like this, and I thought of Lincoln's resolve when he first saw the slave trade in all its iniquity—'If ever I get a chance to hit that thing I'll hit it, and hit it hard.'—John R. Clements.

Secret drinking by women was the subject of evidence given by Mr. H. M. Riley, proprietor of an inebriate home at Leicester, before the Royal Commission. He had had hundreds of cases, and 90 percent, according to the statements of the women themselves, were traceable to grocers' licenses. It was such a simple matter by this means to get a bottle of spirits along with ordinary groceries. Railway refreshment rooms and the stores also afforded facilities for drinking without being seen. These inebriates belonged to the middle and higher middle-classes; the witness thought that women of the lower classes did not mind going into a public-house.