

A SONG OF SLEIGH-BELLS.

Joy our bells are ringing
O'er the snow;
Happiness is springing
Where we go.
Life is bright before us,
Storm-clouds hang not o'er us.
Hope and faith uphold us,
Joy and love enfold us,
The while we sing,
And sleigh-bells ring!

Has life e'er a sorrow?
Hint not so!
Troubles shall we borrow?
No, ah no!
From Hope's light-leaping fountains
To far rose-tinted mountains
Full bravely we have started,
And, merry and true-hearted,
Shall gayly sing,
While sleigh-bells ring!

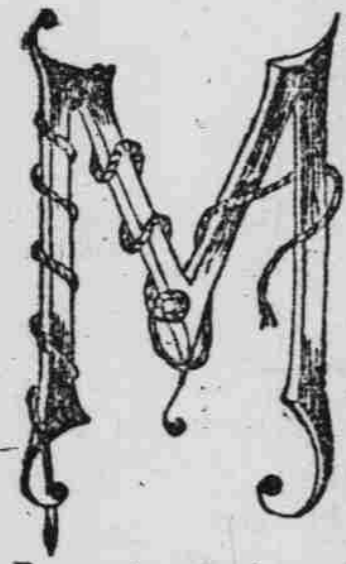
Before us lies a hollow,
Dark and low,
Whose winding path we follow,
Will or no!

In that valley lowly
Shadows deep may slowly
Hide the moon, declining,
Still we know her shining!
So gayly sing,
While sleigh-bells ring!

—Helen Everson Smith, in Harper's Bazar.

Tact of Miss Aspinwall-Jones.

BY WILLIAM EARLE BALDWIN.



MISS ASPINWALL Jones has watched it from the very beginning with the interest most people take in other people's love affairs, and she feels exceedingly sorry that it has all gone wrong; that is, she is sorry for Laurie Jerome. She thinks Agnes

Lancaster most unreasonable and positively unforgiving.

Miss Aspinwall-Jones is not a meddler, but she thinks this particular affair is her own private property, for if the final quarrel did not take place under her own roof, it did take place not far from her tennis court, at a tennis party late in the autumn.

At that time Agnes Lancaster was very positive that she loved Laurie Jerome. In fact, she was engaged to him. But this did not keep her from enjoying exceedingly the society of other men. This, and Jerome's natural jealousy, caused a great deal of trouble, which culminated on the tennis court that afternoon.

It was done very quietly, as all serious things are done. There were no tears, no dramatic stalking about, no words of anger. Jerome idly knocked a tennis ball up into the air with his racket, as he listened to what the girl had to say, and when she remarked that it was better that they separate, and that it was plainly more for their good to be apart for the rest of their lives, he assented quietly and did not stop counting the numbers of times the ball went up into the air.

"Twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one," he said, mechanically.

"There is nothing more to say or do," declared the girl. "We have made a mistake, that's all."

"Thirty-five, thirty-six," counted Jerome, his eyes still on the ball.

"I am as much to blame as you," admitted the girl. "I don't suppose you mind much, though."

Crash! went the ball down on the table into the midst of a cluster of lemonade glasses.

"Did I break any?" asked Jerome, looking at them anxiously.

"No, I think not," replied Agnes, with equal interest.

Miss Aspinwall-Jones saw it all, and heard it all, and yet she was quite helpless and unable to do anything. When Jerome came up to say good-bye, she wanted to tell him how very sorry she was, but she knew it would hardly do. And the drawn look on his face, when he told her he was going

West for some hunting and shooting, haunted her for many days after.

And all the while Jerome was far away after big game and even in some little danger, Miss Aspinwall-Jones did not forget, by any means, him. The moment he came back, she sent him an invitation to her bowling party, together with a charming little note. This was very pleasant to Jerome, who had been out of civilization for so long, and he made haste to accept.

As he comes into the bowling alley, he stands near the entrance a moment, hesitating. There is a great deal of confusion; snatches of conversation, the shouts of the boys in the pit, the crashing of pins, and the dull booming of the balls, mingled with exclamations of joy or little cries of chagrin, all adding to Jerome's bewilderment, make him feel more out of it than ever.

Sometimes a large ball rolls lazily down the center to hit the king pin and clears the alley as if a tempest had struck it. Sometimes a small ball skips down the smooth boards for a single pin, knocking it up into the air with a loud "plunk!" Sometimes a ball whirls along the very edge, twisting and curving in until it strikes the king pin a little to one side, knocking all ten pins into the pit with the peculiar musical tone which gladdens the bowler's heart.

How brightly the sun shines in at the windows of the place, lighting up the faces of the people, glancing on the polished maple of the alleys and the smooth rolling balls! How the notes in the air rise and fall and sway and pulsate, turning red and green and orange, and answering every wave and motion of the air, and writhe and turn into many glistening bands! How happy and jolly the people are, and how they laugh, as if they hadn't a care in the world and as if bowling was the only thing worth living for!

Miss Aspinwall-Jones draws near at that moment and sees Jerome standing there. Her face lights up with a cordial greeting, and she says: "Why, Mr. Jerome, I am awfully glad to see you." And that the man is very popular is made evident by the fact that a great many people come up and shake hands with him and say they are glad to see him back. And the men say, "Hello, Laurie, old fellow," and Miss Aspinwall-Jones, who believes in rushing things, adds: "You are just in time to bowl on number three with Agnes."

Jerome looks at the girl beseechingly, and she nods brightly and says: "Why not?"

Jerome laughs uneasily and echoes: "Why not?" And then he pulls at his mustache, and frowns in a rude and most unbecoming manner.

"At least," puts in Miss Aspinwall-Jones with a meaning smile, "I can remember the time when you would give anything to see her. I have heard of a man who wrote poetry to her and walked up and down under her window with a guitar."

"Oh, I say!" protests the unfortunate Jerome.

"Well, didn't you?"

"That was last summer. Er—things, you know, have sort of—er—changed, you see."

"Changed?" There is a note of guilelessness in Miss Aspinwall-Jones's voice that is pretty and childish.

"How much does she know?" queries Jerome anxiously to himself.

"I won't tease you any more," says Miss Aspinwall-Jones. "Only there is one thing I must say—you don't understand girls."

"Who does?" remarked the man.

"And I must say I don't understand you," he added, rather cynically.

"Who does?" echoes the girl, with a laugh. "Perhaps—some time—you will."

They have reached alley number three, and a tall girl is standing there eyeing them with much coolness and evidently with much disfavor.

"Agnes, here is Mr. Jerome, and he is going to bowl with you," says Miss Aspinwall-Jones. "He has just come back from Kansas, and if you like he will tell you all about shooting, and all about the gasoline stove that blows up regularly every night."

Agnes looks from one to the other

and laughs with embarrassment. She knows that Miss Aspinwall-Jones is very clever, and while she knows a great many things she is liable to guess at a great many more; and even though she is her most intimate friend, she would never, never like her to know what she is thinking about. And so she laughs and says civilly "I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Jerome." And then she turns to Miss Aspinwall-Jones, and asks in a puzzled way: "Gasoline stove? what about a gasoline stove?"

But Miss Aspinwall-Jones has flitted away, leaving Jerome and Agnes together; and from the other side of the room she smiles back contentedly, little knowing that Agnes is ready to resolve never to speak to her again, and that Jerome is wishing heartily that he had remained out in Kansas where he could shoot all day and not have to talk with young women who are distant and scornful, and who make him feel that he is very much in the way.

Even the incident of the gasoline stove fails to establish easy relations, and he starts in on another story which, however, is nipped in the bud.

On the other side of the room, Miss Aspinwall-Jones sees them talking and says: "I have got them together," and congratulates herself on her tact. Miss Aspinwall-Jones is very young, and her ideas of doing good to other people often lead to complications.

In the present instance they lead to a great many complications. Agnes is very intent on bowling, and Jerome shows that he has forgotten all about it. When she makes a strike Jerome follows it up with a score of three pins, and two balls in the gutter. He becomes very angry, writes his tally on the wrong side of the blackboard and covers his fingers, his coat and everything in sight with chalk.

Then it is a pleasure to see Agnes bowl, and he forgets everything else in watching her. Her figure is superb, tall and willowy, and, with a long, graceful swing of the arm, she sends a ball down the alley. She holds her head in a queenly way, and eight seasons in society have not dimmed the beauty and sparkle of her dark eyes, nor made havoc with the damask of her clear complexion.

"Why don't you roll?" she asks, presently, as Jerome stands before her a moment, looking at her intently. The pins at the foot of the alley have all been set up, and there is a pause in the bowling. She points a bit of chalk at him and smiles bewitchingly in a way that makes Jerome lose his head.

"What do I care about this stupid bowling?" he says, passionately. "What do I care about anything—but you? You know why I went away, and you ought to know why I came back."

Agnes looks coldly at him. "Yes; I ought to know. I certainly spoke plainly to you six months ago. I think there is no need to say anything more."

"There are a great many things to say," continued Jerome, "if I only knew how to say them."

"I don't see that you need any help," remarks the girl, dryly. And then: "Miss Aspinwall-Jones is beginning to look worried because she sees that you are not bowling."

Jerome seizes a huge ball and hurls it down the alley at a tremendous speed. Straight as a die it rolls down the centre; there is a crash as it strikes the king pin, and then all ten pins with one accord topple into the pit.

The bowling assumes a new aspect; it is something to occupy his mind. He says nothing more, except:

"What you told me six months ago final, is then?"

And the girl, with tightly compressed lips, mutters: "Yes."

Bang! go the balls down the alley now. The pin-boys wonder what has come into that tall, dark-haired man, that he is so reckless. He nearly kills two of them, when they shout back: "Take care, there!" and Jerome echoes "Take care!" He feels that one boy more or less is of no consequence, and he begins to be very polite and talk commonplaces with Agnes Lancaster. Has she been having a good time this winter? and is she going out

much? and are there to be a great many dances? He says that he is sorry he is not going to be there, for he has had a great many charming waltzes with Miss Lancaster, and he would like to have a great many more. And until the bowling party is over he talks about a great many things which he forgets the moment they are said.

And when the people begin to go and Agnes leaves him, Jerome remains with Miss Aspinwall-Jones and a lot of people he hasn't seen for a long time. He enjoys himself thoroughly until it suddenly occurs to him that he ought to be very miserable. But when he leaves the building and walks home alone he finds himself bitterly regretting that it is all over with Agnes.

It has been thawing all day and the walks are covered with slush. Jerome has to pass through a narrow street, and he sees the outlines of tall buildings against the clear sky. A whistle blows in a factory not far away. Sleighs grate along the streets, which are denuded of snow, so that the bare stones show here and there in patches. The water streams across the walk in places, through which Jerome splashes recklessly. As he walks absently toward his room he unwittingly cuts a number of his acquaintances.

He realizes for the first time that he is getting old. The familiar streets that seem unfamiliar with their life and bustle, and the cries of the news-boys and the sound of cabs and drays and sleighs, and the familiar old buildings—all these things force themselves on his mind in a way that makes him realize how far back his memory goes, and how long ago are the good times that have gone.

He dines with a half dozen men at his club and reconsiders his determination not to go to the dance that night at Miss Aspinwall-Jones's. The good comradeship rather pulls him out of his fit of the blues and he gets away early for a short walk by himself, and then he goes over to the dance. When he gets to the house there is a misunderstanding somewhere. Jerome is sent up stairs and goes absently into the room assigned to the men for the coats—at least Jerome thinks it is the room. It is dimly lighted, and he throws his coat down on a chair and feels for a cigarette, for it is very early and he means to while away the time until some of the other men come. Then, all at once, from a far corner of the room, he hears something that sounds very much like a sob. And he sees the figure of a girl, with her back toward him, and her head bowed.

"Odd," he mutters. "Very odd, indeed. Deuced awkward, too, by Jove! Better get out! Stupidity somewhere!"

But Jerome does not go out, for he recognizes something in the turn of the shoulders that are bent away from him, and instead of escaping he merely stands there pulling nervously at a glove.

He steps forward and then stops again, hesitating. Then all at once the girl draws herself up and stands looking at him blankly. It is Agnes!

It does not occur to Jerome that he should account for his presence. All minor considerations are swept aside, and he knows that the one last chance has come.

He draws back, however, for she may only frown and look bored, and answer in that cold and flippant manner of hers he knows so well. But Jerome has not seen the pained look in her eyes give way and lose itself the moment she caught sight of him. Man-like he has not fathomed the meaning of the gleaming as it flashes forth one brief instant only to be veiled by the lowered lids that close over those tell-tale eyes. He only knows that the tears are gone from her face, and that down stairs in the music room they are playing "In Old Madrid."

The long swaying rhythm of the Spanish music comes up to them like the sound of water beating on a far away beach. His step unconsciously keeps time to the music, his arms are stretched out, and the cold, self-possessed young woman of the afternoon forgets herself, for she does not repel him—and Agnes Lancaster, who has