

Edward Blake: College Student.

By Charles M. Sheldon.

Continued from last issue

"It is not absurd at all. Good God, Ned, don't you see how I am situated? I don't care for the old college. All the time I've been here I've been tempted by the fast set to do the things I've been doing. I'm no scholar. I hate books, except novels. When I think of what it's all for, I don't care a rap for the education. But I like business, and I know as well as anything that I can succeed with the opening my uncle has made for me. Now, if I can settle down in a home of my own I shall be in a fair way to make a man of myself. No other girl ever appealed to me like your sister. I feel as if I could promise her anything and keep it, too, even as I haven't kept my promise to my own mother. Does that mean nothing to you? It means everything to me."

There was quite a silence in the room. Then Edward spoke very slowly: "Then you want my sister to sacrifice herself to save you. Is that it?" "I don't ask her to sacrifice anything. She does not care for me," replied Willis proudly.

Edward did not reply to this, and after awhile Willis said: "I'm going to write to your mother and ask her if I may speak to Freeda. If she gives her consent, I suppose it's all right." "I shall never give mine."

"But she is of age. She can decide for herself."

"I mean that it will never be with my approval that you ask Freeda to marry you. I haven't any fears about the answer she will give you."

Nevertheless, he did have some fears, and Willis seemed to know that fact.

"It all rests with her, then. Will you promise me one thing, Ned? Will you promise not to say anything to her before I get word from your mother? After all, isn't a man to be allowed to choose for himself when he loves a person?"

Edward hesitated. He did not know just what his mother would say. But what Willis said had a good deal of weight after all.

"Yes, I'll promise that," he said at last reluctantly.

"All right. Thank you," replied Willis, and then, as by agreement, the conversation stopped.

A week later Willis showed Edward a letter from Mrs. Blake.

Edward read it through in some surprise. It was in answer to Willis' letter, in which he had evidently gone into a full account of the matter. He had put his case as strongly as possible, and Mrs. Blake had evidently sympathized with him to a degree.

His proposal concerning Freeda had come as a great surprise, but she was willing that Freeda should decide her future. She had always given her great freedom and did not wish to coerce her feeling. At the same time she ventured to express her strong regret that Mr. Preston was not a Christian by profession and more than hinted her doubts concerning Freeda's acceptance of such a future on account of her religious home training, etc. The letter closed with a reluctant assent to Willis' appeal to be allowed to speak to Freeda.

"It's all right so far as your mother is concerned," said Willis, with some satisfaction, as Edward handed back the letter.

Edward did not answer.

"There's one more thing I want to ask of you, Ned, and that is that you let me speak to Freeda before you say anything to her against me. Will you?"

"I won't say anything to her. Let her settle it," replied Edward shortly.

This was about two weeks before commencement. Three days after, as Edward was going over to the library to get a book, he met Freeda coming from the hall. Her face bore marks of weeping, and Edward knew at once what the reason was.

He went up to her and faced her with sympathy.

"Come, Freeda, take a walk with me out on the lower campus and tell me what you can. I know about it."

Freeda silently assented, and they went down to a seat under an old elm and sat down there after walking slowly around the wide path that encircled the campus.

"And I couldn't give him any other answer, Ned, could I?" asked Freeda as she continued her account of the unexpected interview she had had with Willis.

"No, I don't see how you could," replied Edward gravely. "And yet you say, dear, that you had begun to like him very much?"

"Like? Isn't that the word to use, Ned. I'm afraid I think a great deal too much of him for my own happiness now. And yet I felt as sure all the time he was asking me to marry him and looking so handsome and so brave—here Freeda choked a little and Edward waited in sympathetic silence for her to recover—"so brave, Ned, that I had hard work to say no. And yet I knew it was for the best. I told him plainly that I feared for my future with him on account of his drinking especially. And he promised everything about giving it up for my sake. But I have no faith in his promises. Isn't it strange, Ned, even though I believe I have sincerely come to—to—actually I think more of him than of any one, I still know, somehow, that after awhile he would begin to drink again, and our home would be ruined? It's an awful thing, the drink habit, isn't it, Ned?"

"It certainly is, dear. And you don't

believe you could keep him from it?" he asked, finding his sympathy for his sister softening his feeling toward Willis.

"No, I've no faith in that, Ned," replied Freeda sadly. "I don't believe in marrying a young man to reform him. A man has no right to ask a girl to do that. He ought to come to her as pure and free from vices as he expects her to be. Men are not expected to marry bad women to reform them. What right have they to expect a girl to do that for them?"

"You will not regret your decision, dear," at last Edward said. "I am very glad of it. I feel as you do about it. You would never be happy."

"No, I don't regret it," answered Freeda, pushing her foot nervously over the cinders at the foot of the seat. And then, to Edward's surprise and distress, she clasped her hands in her lap, while the tears ran over her face as she said, "But I am very unhappy now, Ned, for I think I loved him very much."

That evening Willis did not come in until quite late, and Edward waited



"You will not regret your decision, dear," for him. The minute he saw Willis' face he knew that he had taken his answer in a hard way.

"Of course you know all about it," he said, with a short laugh. "She's too good for me. I made her confess that she cared for me though. You said she didn't."

Edward came very near getting angry again. Nothing but his sense of Willis' keen disappointment kept him from it.

"I'm going home this week," Willis continued shortly. "I'll skip examinations anyway."

Edward tried to persuade him to stay and finish out the work of the year.

"What's the use? I'm going to New York this summer anyhow. Your sister will have a good deal to answer for

if I go to the bad when I get to the city."

At that Edward boiled over with righteous wrath.

"Look here, Willis! Don't you dare charge your own miserable selfishness to my sister! It's all your own fault that she couldn't marry you. And if you go to the bad now it will be your own fault and no one's else, besides showing her that you never really cared anything for her. If you did, you would make a man of yourself."

Willis sat down and leaned his elbow on the old table and put his head on his hand. Then he lifted a haggard face to Edward and said:

"You're right. I'm a poor, miserable, selfish fool, and I would wreck her life if she should put it into my keeping. I know as I sit here that I shall go to the devil through drink, no matter what happens. I've had the tortures of hell to fight all these weeks. Do you know when your sister told me finally that her refusal was absolute and that I had not the slightest hope I had a horrible feeling of something like relief to think that now I had an excuse to go to drinking again. Just as sure as I sit here, Ned, I'm certain that I shall drink myself crazy drunk in less than ten years. And yet grandfather always said drink never hurt him any. He was one of these personal liberty fellows. He never thought of the possibility that I might go to the devil even if he didn't. It's possible, though, that we shall meet in hell. Maybe in God's sight he's as much to blame as I am."

"Don't!" cried Edward, shocked at the reckless, savage manner in which Willis spoke. The sight of the miserable face and the thought of Willis' possible future haunted him all the rest of his college course.

"God keep you from knowing anything about this feeling," said Willis more gently, and then he rose suddenly and came over to Edward.

"Ned, old boy, I'm going away, and I may never see you again. I owe you a lot for the way you've borne with me, and I'll never forget it. You and Freeda have prompted the best feelings I ever had. Don't think too hard of me, will you? I wish you'd write to me once in awhile. Don't give me up, even if I do seem to be past hope. Maybe Whenton's prayers will save me yet."

Oh, Edward Blake, college student, when the judgment day reveals the secrets of the universe, will you see then what you missed because you were not a Christian? What might you have said or done at this time to save this poor soul if you had really had some higher standard of life than your cold, moral standard, that never warmed your heart or fired your soul to help save another soul? The Lord open your eyes to see not only the great opportunity you missed, but also the great sin of daring to live always with no better purpose than the one that has so far ruled you.

So he let Willis go, and go out of his life, at least for the time being, with a kindly and even a self-reproachful feeling, that in time became a vague

sort of hope that he might not turn out quite so bad as he himself said he would. And yet if the clutch of his grandfather's sins was on him, how is it that even then you do not yet realize, either of you, that there is a power even greater than hereditary taint in the blood and that the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God can cleanse even that taint of that other blood? For he is able to save to the uttermost those that put their trust in him.

And now the commencement season was on, and Edward realized that he was through his junior year, and in a few days, as soon as the graduating class had received their diplomas, his own class would be entitled to the dignified name of seniors. He was not so devoid of imagination as not to be quite deeply moved at the thought. He and Freeda were now classified together, for, although she had entered six months earlier, Edward had arranged his course so as to make up certain studies, and Freeda had dropped back a part of a year in order to be with him and take a special course in music. So they were glad to think of the comradeship still possible for them another year.

As they sat together that commencement day and heard the charge to the outgoing class they realized as never before the value of their college life. The president never said very much at commencement. Perhaps that is one reason why the class that graduated remembered a good many things and carried them away with them.

"It would not be fair nor true to say to you," continued the president after giving the diplomas, "that you had all done the very best you knew how during your entire college course. You yourselves know that you have neglected many opportunities and wasted many important hours. You cannot now help this, and I am not going to use this occasion to blame you for not having made better use of your advantages."

"The question for you to ask now is, What can I do with what I have gained in Hope college? As you go out into the world you will find a great many temptations to use your intelligence selfishly. A college bred man or woman always is strongly tempted to be more or less exclusive, growing farther and farther from a knowledge of and sympathy for the people. Will you let me urge every one of you to use your powers developed here to get nearer the people who have not had your advantages? If education does not mean a brotherhood, if it does not mean the strong bearing of the infirmities of the weak, then it is not Christian; it is pagan in its selfishness and narrowness."

"There is just one other thing I want you to feel at this time, and that is the first thing in all life. I mean the Christian life. If every member of

this class in the course of the next ten years should forget every lesson he ever learned in mathematics or chemistry or astronomy, the loss might be great, but it would not necessarily be vital nor fatal to a life of great usefulness. But if every one of you ten years from now should forget and cease to practice all the lessons you have been taught in Christian character and the value of truth and purity and self denial and usefulness the loss would be not only terrible, but absolutely irreparable. All the things you have learned in the whole college course are not worth knowing without the knowledge of God. Paul said that if a man had all knowledge, but did not have love, it profited nothing; it

did not venture to break the silence, and Edward at last said slowly: "I'm much obliged to you, Whenton, for your interest in me. I'm afraid I don't deserve it."

"That's not the question," began Whenton eagerly. "I believe you don't realize all you are missing as you go on with your college course. A Christian faith in your own life would make a wonderful change in it."

"Am I so bad as all that?" asked Edward, with a slight laugh, beginning to feel rise in himself suddenly that unreasoning anger that he had felt before when Whenton had spoken to him.

"No, you don't understand. But there is a great difference in the life that has put Christ into everything and the life that does not call him Lord. I wish you could see it clearly."

Edward was silent again, and Whenton looked and evidently felt disappointed. As Edward made no sign of saying anything, Whenton rose.

"I'm sorry if I've intruded on you, Blake, or said something I ought not. Some day perhaps you'll understand my motive. I pray the Holy Spirit may move your heart and bring you into the kingdom."

He walked over to Edward simply and held out his hand. Edward felt ashamed of himself, because he knew he had treated Whenton rudely. He tried to offer a word of apology.

"I don't question your interest in me, Whenton, even if I don't understand it. And of course I don't forget what I owe you for your kindness during my sickness. I'll always remember that with the greatest gratitude. I hope you will be back in the fall."

"Thank you. I hardly think I shall. I shall not be satisfied, Blake, until I hear that you have given yourself to Christ."

He shook hands seriously and went away, leaving Edward standing by the window, hardly knowing whether to feel vexed at the interview or pleased at Whenton's interest in him.

It was still raining quite hard, and there was an hour yet before supper. So he stood aimlessly by the window for a few moments more after Whenton had gone. As he stood there looking out he saw Professor Clark come out of the chapel and start down the steps toward his house, which was three or four blocks farther down the hill. The professor was very absent-minded, and if he brought an umbrella with him he had probably forgotten it or handed it to some one else who had forgotten to return it.

Edward caught up his own umbrella, put on his hat and ran down the stairs and across the way. He overtook the professor just as he went out of the college gates. It had begun to rain harder.

"Take the umbrella, sir, and I will run back to the hall," he said.

"No, no. You go with me, Blake. Thank you. I really own several dozen umbrellas somewhere, but other people are probably carrying them when it rains. Which should you say was worse, owning umbrellas that other people carry or carrying umbrellas that other people own?"

Edward felt somewhat annoyed, for he guessed what Whenton wanted to say, but he had come to feel more respect for him than he once felt, and so he answered quite pleasantly.

"Come up right after the exercises here, and I'll have a little time."

"All right; thank you," said Whenton gratefully.

When Edward went up to his room after the class exercises were over, he found Whenton waiting for him in the hall. They went in, and Whenton somewhat awkwardly took the seat Edward offered.

"I'm not going to apologize, Blake, for saying what I have in my mind at this time," began Whenton, and all his awkwardness and embarrassment vanished as he began to speak. "I may not come back to Hope next year on account of matters at home, and I may not ever see you again. But I have been praying for you almost ever since you entered Hope, and I have carried a burden in my soul for you that you might accept Christ as a personal Saviour. Won't you give it a serious thought, Blake? Not because I ask you to, but because you owe it to Christ to be his disciple. You have great power for good in this college. Your influence would be something wonderful if as positively Christian. Why don't you surrender yourself to him, Blake? Will you never regret it as long as you if you do?"

Whenton paused, and Edward sat looking out of the window at the drip-branches of the big elm near by. He was distinctly displeased with what he had just said. "Confound the fellow!" he was saying within himself. Whenton was speaking. "Why did he pick out today of all days to do his association religion to me?"

As Whenton went on a curious sense of feeling took place in Edward's mind. Why should Whenton say anything about him anyway? At difference did it make to him that Blake was a Christian or not? If he really was anxious about the care of his (Edward Blake's) soul any reason whatever, what more to expect than that he would seize opportunity he could to speak on subject?

Edward was silent so long as he listened to this little monologue that at last thought he was perhaps given the subject serious consideration.

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He sat and chatted easily with the professor a few minutes and then rose to go. The professor went out into the hallway with him.

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