

The Free Press Short Story

FROST WARNING

V. OSTERGAARD

THE annual Halloween party in Max Putnam's old barn loft was in full swing. In the yellow-orange light from sixteen grinning jack-o'-lanterns, half a hundred boys and girls watched a freckle-faced lad bobbing for apples.

There were shouts of laughter, and a surging cry of triumph from the diver whose dripping head finally emerged from the tub, his white teeth imbedded in the red fruit.

In a corner of the old building near the radio stood Max, a red-haired fellow, quietly observant and happy. Beside him Lucille Byers was sharing his pleasure in the scene. She threw back her pretty blonde head and laughed when another young person, kneeling beside the tub, his head poised for the plunge, received unexpected help in the form of a push from behind.

Max laughed, too. Then the music from the radio stopped suddenly. The announcer spoke:

"We interrupt our Halloween program," he said clearly, "to warn shippers and farmers of impending heavy frost. A high pressure area is moving in rapidly from the north-west. West and north-west sections of the state should prepare against a low level of twenty degrees Fahrenheit to arrive within twenty-four hours. Listen for additional warnings."

"Our program continues—" The fun at the tub went on without interruption; but Lucille and Max had listened, with sinking hearts, to the distressing news.

Her sweet face upturned and full of self-reproach, Lucille said, "I'm sorry, Max. It's all my fault, insisting that you have the party. I shouldn't have—" He interrupted firmly. "Don't be sorry. I'm not. Most of the crop is lost, but—" he gestured toward the loft full of happy young people, "I guess it's worth it."

Lucille sighed. "I know," she answered, "but so much depended on getting the potatoes in before the frost."

"A great deal depended on the potatoes," Max echoed gravely. He stared straight ahead, trying not to think of his loss and its consequences.

His firm denial of regret to the contrary, Max's heart was heavy. He could not help wishing that he had been able to take advantage of his premonition—strong within him weeks ago—that a heavy frost would come earlier than usual.

Jerry Cray, the boy with the freckles, had caused Max to voice this fear openly.

"You're going to have a party again this year, aren't you, Max?" the boy had asked late one afternoon when Max had met him outside the post office in Sundale.

Max had run a hand through his red hair. "I've been thinking about it," he had admitted. "but I'm pretty busy. You see, I've got to get ten acres of potatoes in before hard frost comes."

"I'll help you get ready for the party," Jerry had offered. "I can find time after school and on Saturdays."

"Well, I don't like to say—" "Don't say we can't have it," Jerry had interrupted. "I'll get some of the fellows to help too."

Max had smiled at his young friend's eagerness. "I won't make any promise now, Jerry. I'll let you know later."

"All right, but don't forget," Jerry had entreated. He was off to join his companions.

Max had stepped into the post office. As he emerged again, wondering what to do about Jerry's plea, he absentmindedly returned the greeting of two men who stood near the entrance. One, Max recalled later, had been a stranger.

He walked on, unfolding his newspaper to glance at the market prices, and came to a stop at the edge of the curb to ponder over the fact that potato prices had dropped slightly. Had the market been a little higher he could have afforded help for the harvest.

Then he forgot the matter of price, and his problem became more acute, as he listened to a fragment of conversation. Without meaning to eavesdrop, he heard the familiar voice of one of the two men still standing near the post-office entrance.

"It was answering a question. 'Halloween pranks? No, we haven't had any trouble in Sundale the past three or four years. Not since Max Putnam took hold. Started the custom of holding parties for the boys who used to get a little careless. Several people doing it now. Each takes a different group.'"

"That's certainly a fine plan," the voice of the stranger approved heartily. "We think so. Max himself passed us a little while ago. The speaker's voice dropped. 'There he is, reading a paper.'"

Max hurriedly walked away. Fraise of his activity in behalf of his young friends did not fit in with his notion of avoiding a party this year that he might harvest his potato crop in time.

Minutes later, he boarded his old truck and drove out to the farm he had leased. The October sun was a flaming red near the horizon. Chores were waiting. A farmer's work, especially the work of

MARTIAN NOTE



What the well-dressed woman will wear in zones where there is danger of air raiders sprinkling noxious gases about is demonstrated by this London miss. She is wearing the new lightweight gas-repellent suit of rose pink, Hood, trousers, jumper and mittens are of silk and can be donned in 35 seconds. The whole outfit weighs but four ounces. It can be packed in a small bag for carrying.

ness in the loft of the old barn. Max was trying frantically to recall the name of a new game, but the second warning had stopped his thoughts. He remained dumb—speechless, it seemed to him—for minutes on end, while in reality only seconds passed. Grateful for the distraction, he saw Jerry stop in the middle of the room and raise his hand.

The boy had listened intently, too. Lucille had seen quick concern on his expressive face, replaced in the next moment by enthusiasm and a big, happy smile of anticipation.

Jerry held up his hand, crying, "Attention, please! I asked Max what would be next, but I'll answer the question myself. It's home to bed as soon as Max'll let us go!"

There were answering shouts and protests. "No, no!" "Sit down!" "No! your turn to talk!" "You heard that frost warning come in over the radio, didn't you?" Jerry asked the assemblage.

There was scattered replies in the affirmative. "Well, then," Jerry exclaimed, "you'll understand why I say, it's home to bed for us. We're going home early because to-morrow we're going to dig potatoes. Max Putnam's big Green Mountain potatoes."

"He put off harvesting 'em in order to have time to prepare this party for us. The least we can do is to go home and ask our mothers and fathers to let us come back early to-morrow morning with buckets and sacks and whatnot to gather up potatoes. And you better bring something to eat—I guess we've eaten everything in sight to-night. Are you with me?"

They were, unmistakably. The next day dawned behind gray-blue clouds rolling endlessly out of the northwest. Under the clouds a chill wind whistled. It sang through the barbed-wire fence bordering Max Putnam's farm, and whipped the manes and tails of two black horses studiously plodding the length of a field of potatoes.

Only withered vines were left to mark the middle of ridged rows; but to the driver of the digger the cold wind and dead vines meant nothing, for below him a big concave blade scooped into the earth, far under the vines, and behind him the belt conveyor gently dropped to the ground an unending stream of big, smooth-skinned potatoes.

The wind was chill, but Max smiled. Now and then he stopped his team to give brief, cheerful directions to the boys and girls who were scattered over the field, busily gathering in the harvest. By midforenoon he had counted thirty-one helpers, not including Henry Byers, Lucille's father, who had borrowed a team somewhere and was studiously guiding a walking plow up one row and down the next, turning up to the light a myriad of Green Mountain potatoes.

At high noon Lucille appeared, a wind-blown figure, over the crest of the hill. She waved when she saw Max and trudged on to stop beside him.

"Mother and I will have dinner ready in half an hour," she said. "What are you going to feed us? This army out here'll need a lot of food."

"Lucille laughed. She pointed to a great golden-white mound in the middle of the field. "Some of your potatoes," she answered.

The Sunday School Lesson

FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29th

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

(International Temperance Sunday) Golden Text.—Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?—1 Corinthians 6: 9.

Lesson Texts.—Micah 2: 9-11; Luke 21: 29-31, 34-36; 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11.

Exposition.—A Warning from the Fallures of Israel, Micah 2: 9-11. The downfall of Israel was due to apostasy. Instead of remaining true to the Word and Will of God the people turned to their own sinful intelligence (Isa. 44: 1-6; Jer. 1: 7). The purpose of God for Israel was that it should be a holy nation. As long as the people revered God and obeyed His Word they were capable of becoming what God intended. When they turned away from Him their whole natural life became decadent.

One of the tragic consequences of apostasy is that the apostate people fail to sense the horrible realities of their state. They become blind to truth. They are deaf to appeals for their salvation. As this Scripture indicates also, the whole social order begins to disintegrate. For instance, consider the treatment of womanhood and child life described in v. 9. Widows of men slain were cast out of their homes. Orphaned children were snatched away from any hope of happiness or comfort. It has always been so that the greatest sufferers from ungodly living are women and children.

Apostasy leads to cruelty and cruelty to penalty. So, no wonder we read in v. 10 of the irrevocable decision of God to cast them out. They had left His way and had become unprofitable (Ps. 14: 1-4). Consequently they were to be discarded by Him. An evidence of this is seen in v. 11. Instead of true prophets God would let them have false ones. Those who will not be reformed hate to be rebuked, so the true prophet was hated and frequently killed.

They wanted lying propaganda, so they would get it. It is even so in our own apostate day that lying propaganda regarding wines, beer and liquor is more heeded in many places than the honest Godly exponent of virtue, righteousness and self-denial. A God-fearing people will listen to the warnings and counsels of a prophet of God. But among apostates it is a common thing for men who have only the spirit of error to pretend that they have the Spirit of God. From such come advocates of strong drink who delude the people. A people deceived and debauched will come to want ministers who will comfort them in their sensuality.

II. A Warning for the Times, Luke 21: 29-31.

Most of this chapter has to do with the events which characterize the end of this age. The significance of this passage in a so-called Temperance lesson is obscure. We may apply it in the sense that a symptom of the end of the age will be a widespread apostasy (Luke 18: 2; 2 Tim. 3: 1; 1 John 2: 18, 19). Lawlessness comes with such a spiritual decline. Wars increase, crime multiplies, whole communities become debauched with alcohol, domestic purity is destroyed and people exercise this liberty to corrupt one another (2 Tim. 3: 2-7).

Amid all the signs to which our Lord directed His disciples He pointed out that their presence meant not their defeat but their victory. "The kingdom of God is nigh at hand." In view of the moral chaos which is in the world and in which many Christians are inclined to be depressed, we need to take our Lord's words to heart.

III. A Warning to the Saints, Luke 21: 34-36.

The imminency of the return of our Lord is still in view. Jesus cautions His people against sensual living that unfit a Christian from a pure spiritual relationship with Himself. Sensuality is the enemy of spirituality. Drunkenness is Satan's substitute for God's Spirit. People enslaved by alcohol cannot be in sweet and holy communion with Christ (1 Cor. 6: 9-11). Clashed with this are the "cares of this life." Sensuous people are inclined to value their life more than their eternal life.

When the day of Christ dawns, such people will be taken "unawares." The surprise of these warnings of condemnation will be awe-inspiring. Realizing they have sinned away their day of grace, they will be conscious that they are to pass through the day of the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6: 15-17). From such a "snare" may we all be delivered. The way this may be done is to realize that immoderate living has its spiritual dangers. A disordered life disrupts one's relation to Christ. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. He who keeps his body under has the best chance to keep his spirit on top (Gal. 5: 22-24).

IV. A Warning to the Unsaved, 1 Cor. 6: 9-11.

Here is plain truth which every sinner ought to face. It is not to be used by itself because it would lead many to despair. But it is there just the same. The unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. One thing is certain: then we must get rid of our unrighteousness both as a manner of life and as a measure of guilt. The manner of life here described is that of sensuous persons: people who seek their highest satisfactions only in the flesh. Such people are not fit to become citizens of the Kingdom of God. That kingdom

is a collection of purified and pure souls; there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth or maketh a lie. While people, therefore, pursue a sensuous life they are keeping themselves outside the Kingdom of God.

ELK HERALD AUTUMN SEASON AT BANFF

Sounding the arrival of autumn, numbers of elk or wapiti were heard "bugling" in the vicinity of Banff, headquarters of Banff National Park, Alberta, as early as September first. The migration of this magnificent species of the deer family from higher altitudes is usual in the Fall season, but the vocal intimation of their arrival in the vicinity of Banff was heard two or three weeks earlier than usual.

Another noteworthy feature connected with the arrival of the elk was the fact that their antlers were free of the "velvet" or outer sheath which protected them during the long period of growth since early spring. While some residents have suggested that such occurrences foretell an early and cold winter, it is also reasonable to attribute these developments to the open and healthy preceding season.

The bugle or challenge-call of the male elk is a very distinctive one, and has been heard for a distance of a mile. It rises by a series of flutes, as do the strings of a cello, to a relatively high note or whistle, and descending rapidly ends less mutually in a guttural cough or grunt. Heard close at hand, the whistle at times sounds like a shrill scream.

An animal survey made during the past summer in Banff National Park disclosed the presence of elk in almost all parts of the park, with concentrations most noticeable in the valleys of the Bow, Cucumber, Panther, and Spray Rivers. Elk change their range frequently. In midsummer they are found generally at high altitudes, but in the autumn they descend to the lower valleys where they are often found in close proximity to human habitation.

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AN EGG TRICK

If you spin a hard-boiled egg on a small wooden tray, and gently move the tray in a small circle in the opposite direction to that in which the egg is spinning, you can make the egg revolve for as long as you like. Ask a friend if he can spin an egg for an indefinite period. He will fail, and then you can produce your hard-boiled one and succeed.