

A Lesson in Courtesy

By A. E. Cook. From Canadian
"White Ribbon Tidings."

One lovely summer afternoon Mrs. Barr and her neighbour, Mrs. Graham, were sitting in the lawn-swing on the former's shady lawn, chatting as they busied themselves sewing for the Red Cross. Both ladies were active members of their respective churches, in Missionary Work and in Ladies' Aid, as well as being ardent members of, and workers in, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. All through the war they had helped the Red Cross, sending parcels to boys overseas and preparing many "bundles for Britain." Now the actual fighting was ended they still sewed and collected clothing for the needy folk in the war-devastated countries of Europe, welcomed war-brides, visited hospitals, and in other ways did all they could to help those in dire need.

Mrs. Barr and Mrs. Graham were both in their later thirties, with teenage young people in their homes. As was natural they spoke of the many temptations their young folk had to face in these ultra-modern days, especially in the supposedly "smart set" to which so many teen-agers belonged, a set which seemed to think a party could not be a success unless there were "cocktails," or wine, or beer, according to the taste of the group.

"You know," Mrs. Graham remarked, "I'm puzzled at the attitude of many otherwise intelligent and good-hearted women who have succumbed to the prevailing custom of serving what they call the "social glass," and some who never used to have liquor in their homes now think they **just must** serve alcoholic drinks. They seem to take it as a personal affront if a guest dares to refuse these beverages and asks politely for a glass of water. Why do you suppose they act that way?"

"Well, I'm not quite sure. I've sometimes thought that back of that feeling of offence is an accusing conscience, which makes the hostess feel that the abstaining guest may make the "cocktail-drinking members of her party suffer embarrassment."

"Yes, I can see that might be. But why don't they ever think how difficult that attitude makes it for the non-drinkers? THEY don't want to offend either hostess or guests, but they feel they should be allowed to choose to drink or not to drink without any fear that they might embarrass anyone else."

Both were silent for a few moments. Presently Mrs. Barr spoke.

"I had an unusual experience along that very line recently. All hostesses aren't discourteous to, or thoughtless about, their abstaining guests, you may be sure, and that is what I found out." She paused.

"Go on Mrs. Barr. My curiosity is aroused. What happened?"

"It happened at a Red Cross Tea, where only wine and small cakes were to be served by the hostess. I was apparently a stranger to all but my hostess, whom I had met at a tea given by our W.C.T.U. in aid of war-orphans. She was a gracious, cultured English lady, and had made us all feel happy and at ease. I had noticed one person in the group, a rather loud-voiced, domineering type, whose manner and voice seemed to say "I'm **somebody**" and whose presence was the only jarring note.

"Well, to shorten my story, the hostess began to pass the wine and cakes. I noticed that everyone took the wine, and it so chanced that I was the last to be offered refreshments. I smiled and quietly said, "Mrs. Blank, do you mind if I ask for a glass of water?"

"WELL! of all thing!" exploded the arrogant person. "Such **nerve!** I never saw such rudeness."

I knew my face went red, but our gracious hostess looked squarely at the rude guest and countered, politely, but coldly:

"Why do you call Mrs. Barr rude? If you were in **her** home, and she

offered you tea, and you, for your own reasons, asked for hot water, would any guest have the right to be as rude to you as you have just been to Mrs. Barr?"

Turning at once to me, Mrs. Blank said:

"Would you care for a glass of orange-juice or grape-fruit juice, Mrs. Barr?"

"Thank you, I would like some fruit juice if convenient, but a glass of water will be quite all right."

A quiet word to the efficient maid soon brought me the deliciously cold glass of fruit-juice, and as I sipped it, my hostess said to the rather embarrassed ladies:

"I should have been more thoughtful, and have remembered that Mrs. Barr belongs to a group whose one rule for membership happens to be total abstinence from all beverages that contain alcohol, even wine. Please forgive me, Mrs. Barr, for having caused you this embarrassing moment."

There was no need for words, as I am sure the grateful smile I gave her told how warmly I appreciated her courtesy."

"Well now, that's what I call a truly courteous lady," was Mrs. Graham's comment. "But really, I wonder why those hostesses who feel they must serve alcoholic drinks nearly always fail to provide for the non-alcohol users? But I must be going. The family will soon be in for supper. (Yes, we're old-fashioned and have dinner at noon.) Thanks for that pleasant story. I only hope that old 'battle-axe' felt properly **squelched**."

"O, come now, don't be too hard on her. Think what a grand opportunity she gave Mrs. Blank to teach her a needed lesson in social courtesy."

"Goodbye Mrs. Barr, I'll be looking for you at our tea at the Market next week."

"I'll be on hand, never fear. Good-bye."