

CHOICE LITERATURE.

TOM'S HEATHEN.

CHAPTER XIII. - HAL SETTLES ONE THING.

Returning one day from the Central police station, whither I had been summoned by something that looked like evidence that Norman Lee had been in Paris since he left Baden-Baden, I found a telegram from Agnes desiring my immediate presence. I went off by the first train, expecting to find Mr. Dyer in an alarming condition.

Answering my inquiry, Agnes explained that her father was in much the same condition that I left him, but Maud was sick. She had been spiritless and languid for several days. Then a slow fever came on that would not yield to treatment. She would not be pacified till I was sent for. "Perhaps the climate does not agree with her, and I think she is homesick," said Agnes in conclusion.

"Homesick!" I went in to see my pet. She was sleeping, and lay with her face pressed into the pillow looking quite pale and woe-begone. My heart smote me for taking the poor little bird away from the mother's nest. As I stood looking at her she awoke, and seeing me she put up a grievous lip and began to cry like the veriest baby. I could get only tears in answer to my questions. At last she said between her sobs: "I shall die if I stay here, uncle Doctor; I know I shall."

"Why? What is the matter, Maud?"

"I don't know. I feel dreadfully. I want to go home; I want my mother."

I could not help smiling. This girl, almost twenty years old, crying with homesickness.

"How much longer must we stay here?" she asked dolefully.

"Some months yet."

"Then I shall die, I know I shall," and her head went down in a fresh tempest of sobs.

"You will feel better in a few days."

"No. It will only grow worse and worse till I die."

I began to think, absurd as it seemed—for she had no disease, and no sickness but this unconscionable homesickness—that she might be correct after all. For she continually drooped and pined, and before the week was out I was at my wit's end. Homesickness is without remedy. Either the patient must go home or be content to stick it out till the mind is occupied with something else. Maud would not stick it out. I hated to see her pining, but we could not go at present. Even the letters that used to cheer only made matters worse. What should I do?

One day she wiped the tears from her pale cheeks asking: "Is there no one going to America? Can't you send me home with some one? I would go if I had to ride a broom, witch-fashion."

Agnes sketched Maud on a broom, clutching the brush for dear life, as with staring eyes and streaming hair she crossed the Atlantic, high above all sailing craft. Whereat we all laughed, without getting even a smile from Maud.

"Mother would not laugh, nor Hal either," said Maud, looking aggrieved.

Hal! that was a good thought. I would cable Hal to come over at once and take Maud home. It would be a respite and a diversion for him. It would cure her; and I should have one less to be anxious for.

Before night the message was on its way with necessary directions concerning funds and other matters, requesting an immediate answer. The next day it came, and I took it to Maud. The effect was magical. She began straightway to mend. Even Agnes was glad to know that Hal was coming.

My anxiety for Maud having abated, I had leisure for a more critical observation of the res. It was apparent that during my absence Agnes and her father had arrived at an understanding concerning this Robert Lyon affair; and he, finding her so helpful, was in his sore need turning to her with eager eyes and hands. It was a month of rejoicing to Agnes. It made her way clear, and loosened somewhat his clutching hold upon me. Agnes, however, said nothing upon the subject, lest her sensitively-bred conscience should accuse her of seeming to betray her father's confidence. It was also evident that the consuming fret which had been in a measure allayed by action and the conviction that we were getting on, had returned with renewed voracity during this enforced delay. I watched his transparent face and glittering eyes sharply, realizing that this thing was making destructive work with his waning vital force. I could think only of a two-edged sword whose scabbard was getting perilously thin.

His room adjoined mine, and night after night I heard him restlessly pacing the hours away. Often before the morning dawned Agnes would softly enter, and taking his arm walk with him up and down, soothing him by her voiceless sympathy. Sometimes I could hear her speak in low tones of comfort or entreaty. But often a word was spoken. She was simply helping him to bear his burden and to feel that he was not entirely alone. Once, after he had been long and wearily pacing, I heard him fall heavily into his chair, and the utter silence that followed was so oppressive and deathlike, that apprehensive of some untoward event I hastily dressed and stepped out on the veranda that ran past his room and mine. A bright light was burning on his table, and through the window I could see him sitting in his chair, his head resting against the high back, his shadowy hands fallen helplessly on his lap, his eyes closed, and his face like the face of a dead man; only that dead men never carry faces so worn with anguish and despair. Was it possible that a man could suffer like this and still live on?

While I was looking at him Agnes came softly in. She too had been watching, and the silence had startled her as well as myself. Her face when she saw him was flooded with unutterable compassion and distress. Without speaking she moved his head from the chair to her breast and covered his face with kisses and tears.

He did not repulse her. His lips parted in a weary moan,

and with closed eyes he endeavored to hide his face in her garments. I returned noiselessly to my room. I had no right, even if I had the heart, to look at a thing like that.

Before morning I resolved although it was still mid-winter, and the experiment might be hazardous in other respects, to take Mr. Dyer and Agnes with me to Paris as soon as Hal and Maud should have started on their homeward route.

In due season Hal arrived and was joyfully welcomed by all. It was always a pleasure to look at Hal. I used to think he would be too pretty for a man; but of late he had lost his prettiness, and gained a strong, manly beauty that commended itself to masculine as well as feminine eyes. He had also a thoughtful, decisive way that was an improvement. Maud complained that he was too sober, but sobriety became him. Agnes considered him a handsome man, and justly.

We had many a long earnest talk concerning his future, and the young fellow developed an unexpected amount of common sense and quaint wisdom. My young nephew was to be respected as well as admired. One day at the close of a long conversation, he said, decisively:

"One of the many things that perplex me must be settled before I return. That once over, perhaps the rest will grow clearer."

"What is it, Hal? if I may know," asked I with a premonitory tinge.

Hal's cheeks flushed like a boy's as he answered quietly. "You know that from the first I admired Miss Dyer; but perhaps you did not know that as I saw her more, my admiration deepened into a strong and earnest love as ever man gave to woman. I know that I was not worthy of her; I know that I am not now; but if she loves me I believe that I should grow better, more worthy. I cannot tell any one what the past year has been to me. Latterly I compelled myself to stand aside, thinking that she preferred Northrop Duff. But just before I sailed a fact came to my knowledge that took him quite out of my road. Now I should be less than a man to go on in this uncertain condition. If she loves me I shall be better for knowing it. If she loves me not, why, God help me; it is quite time I knew that also."

"Has she encouraged you?"

"I cannot say that she has, nor can I say that she has discouraged me. She has treated me unexceptionably. If I had been distasteful to her, I am sure I should have known it some way," said he frankly, though looking exceedingly troubled and perplexed. His love for her was so genuine that it had drawn all the old self-assurance out of him.

"It may be that she has not understood you, ventured I, at length.

"Perhaps so. But women are quick-sighted;" (Hal was already an expert in these matters;) "and what little I have said or written has meant so much to me, that I am sure it must have meant somewhat to her. At all events, I must tell her now, let the result be what it may."

Looking at him as he stood before me, so young, so full of manly beauty and vigor, I felt that if she could love any one, it must be him.

"Well, old boy: go ahead. Perhaps it is the best thing under the circumstances," said I, seizing my hat and muttering something about a business matter in hand, as I went off for one of those long walks that suited me so well of late.

It was quite dark, and I returned by a street that ended opposite the house. Many a night, of late, I had lingered watching the lights from those windows, while pleasant thoughts, unbidden and also unreprieved, kept heart and fancy warm. Perhaps I needed some such tonic as Hal had unconsciously administered. To-night, loth to enter, I waited till I saw Mr. Dyer through his uncurtained window pacing up and down in that endless vigils. This motion had become almost as much a necessity as his breath. At the table sat Agnes, reading to him by the light of a shaded lamp. I could see only her profile and moving lips, but I thought she looked unusually saddened and wearied. She had the same pathetic, patient air that came to her when she first began to bear her father's trouble. Was it the shadow of another trouble that wearied her to-night?

The other rooms occupied by our party lay in darkness, and were apparently deserted. But at the door Maud met me saying joyfully:

"Uncle, Hal has just gone out. He almost ran over me. I stopped him long enough to ask when we were going home, and the dear old fellow said 'Now; any time, the sooner the better.' How good he is to shorten his visit. I am going to pack my trunk to-night. I shall be so glad to get home," she added fervently.

"Then there will be one happy heart," responded I absently.

"More than one I hope," said Maud, her beautiful face flaming rosily. And encountering my gaze she added with suspicious eagerness, "Of course mother and Jack will be glad to see me." What possessed these children? They were getting beyond me.

The next time I saw Hal he was very quiet and avoided my eyes. But as soon as we were alone he came up manfully.

"I saw her after you went out yesterday, and am not sorry. It was best I should know; though," said he with a lip that quivered spite his desperate self-control, "if last night death had come I should have esteemed it the greatest blessing God could give."

"Stop, Hal! You are no coward. You have courage and manliness enough to bear whatever must be borne, be it ever so hard," said I, looking steadily in his eyes; for he was still mentally reeling from the effect of some tremendous blow.

He stood with folded arms and dry, hot eyes, that had known neither sleep nor tears the past forty-eight hours, crowned, too, he was with a dignity, a kind of consecration that suffering alone begets. My heart ached for the boy. He began speaking slowly to steady his voice.

"I make no complaints: I am no fool; I shall not die. People cannot die that way. But how I am to take up my life with the core dropped out, and go on, God only knows." He walked over to the window and stood with his back to

me. I had no wish to see his face. There was a long, dead silence, before I asked:

"Do you mean to say that she refused you, Hal?"

He faced me. "No. With a generosity and a courage few women possess, she anticipated me. I cannot tell exactly what she said. She made me understand that marriage, or any attachment that would look to marriage as a result, was utterly impossible for her. That she belonged wholly to her father. That she had no future that was not inseparable from his. While he lived she had nothing else."

"He cannot live always."

"So I said, or something like that, and begged the privilege of hoping. But she answered that it would be only a cruelty to both. I must think of her ever and always as a friend who had my best welfare at heart. She made me understand that it was quite hopeless, and she seemed so distressed that I had no heart to press her farther."

"One thing," said he musingly, as if the thought of her grief dulled for a moment the sharpness of his own, "she also suffers, but from what cause I am unable to determine." I then, arousing himself, remembering her courage, "Now I am going home, and for her sake will be a man, whatever comes."

CHAPTER XIV. - A STRAIT-JACKET.

Joel Dyer fell eagerly in with the proposed change, and I lost no time in getting him transferred by the easiest route to Paris.

Already I had received notice that a man, supposed to be the person we were in search of, was now in the city driving a carriage, a common *fiacre*, No. 706. He spoke both French and German, was accounted an Englishman, and wrote his name Norman Leigh. It was ascertained that he had been driving less than two weeks, and that previous to this he had been an English interpreter in a small saloon and had been discharged for intemperance. He was rarely quite sober, one of his periodic fits of indulgence being upon him, neither was he so disguised as to be untrustworthy as a driver. He frequented certain localities and was employed principally by English-speaking people.

"But how was I to know that this person was really the man?" pertinently questioned the officer who had the matter in charge. I had never seen Robert Lyon nor Norman Lee, and had no data beyond the description in the "protection papers" as to nativity, height, age and color, which might answer equally well for a hundred other men. I saw in Tom's library the day I found the book presented to Robert Norman Lyon, a photograph which I believed to represent the man we were after. I longed for a copy, but could not take one without Tom's consent, and that was not to be had since I could not even speak to him on the subject. I was obliged to content myself by carrying a copy in my memory. That showed me a man of twenty-five or over, large, fair, with a pleasant blue eye, curling brown hair and a handsome mouth, as attractive as a woman's, but lacking the decision and perseverance necessary for a man. But even that picture would be of little service, for the man must now be forty-five years old, and his manner of life must have changed him greatly. I remembered that Dyer said the last time he saw him that he would not have known him anywhere else; and I doubted if even Dyer could be depended upon to recognize the man if he was put before him.

Telling Agnes, but requesting her to keep the matter from her father till something decisive was known, for in his weary condition these fluctuations were anything but desirable, I went out to find the object of our long search.

Guided by the officer's direction and the number of the carriage, I found him in less than an hour. After a moment's conversation I engaged him to take a lady and myself to the Louvre at one o'clock. This would give me another opportunity for observation, and besides I wanted Agnes to see him, for I thought her penetration could be trusted if mine failed.

True to his appointment, this Norman Leigh was waiting at the place designated. While he was assisting Agnes to enter the carriage I scanned him narrowly. He was under, shorter and stouter than I supposed. As he lifted his hat I saw that he was quite bald. What hair remained was of a light brown, mixed with gray, and curled loosely below the brim of his hat, around the back of his head. His face was high-colored and seemingly bloated. His eyes, faded and restless, but not suspicious, were half hidden by drooping upper and under lids. The mouth, which I had depended upon as the feature least likely to change, was hidden by a waxed gray moustache that gave him a foreign look. One would not pronounce him a vicious or guilty man. He seemed not to shun observation, but to be doggedly indifferent.

I thought he would notice Agnes, for though she was not beautiful, like Maud I mean that she had none of the prettiness that became Maud so well, she was still a very attractive and distinguished looking lady, whom almost any one would turn to see again. But he did not even look at her as he courteously handed her to her seat. It needed but a glance to prove that he was not well. His excesses had told upon his nervous system till he was in a wretched condition. I noticed that his hands were incessantly tremulous. When he left us at our destination he agreed to return for us in two hours.

"What do you think of him?" questioned I of Agnes, as soon as he was out of sight.

"He looks like an Englishman; he uses good English, but he speaks like an American."

"Did you ever hear a voice that at all resembles his?"

"No. I thought his voice unnatural, as if roughened and thickened." Her ear was exceedingly delicate, a trait inherited from her father. He knew people quicker by their voices than by their faces; and I thought that if this man were Tom's brother she would detect the resemblance observed by her father, though she was as ignorant as he of Robert Lyon's relationship to Tom. Probably she was right. His excesses would be likely to roughen his voice.

"What do you think?" eagerly questioning me.

"I know not what to think. If he is the man, my previous impressions have all been astray. When he returns perhaps we can tell better."