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EUSTACE; OR, SELF-DEVOTION.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

I was received by Madame St. Aubert with kindness and warmth—by Eulalie with marks of her old affection. Had such an offer as that of Madame St. Aubert's been made me in former days, it would have been gladly accepted? as it was, the large stipend which this lady offered was not needed, for the little pension I enjoyed was sufficient for my unambitious aspirations, and I could not bear the thought of leaving my sister. I declined it, then, and alleged my own delicate health as one of the reasons which prompted my refusal. It was not without difficulty that I escaped, for Eulalie's tears almost shook my resolution. She then endeavored to persuade her aunt that the next best course to pursue would be to suffer her to go England with me.

I saw a slight flush as of anger cross the lady's face, as Eulalie timidly urged her request. She was evidently piqued that her niece felt more affection for one who was lately a stranger to her than to her own relation; also, perhaps, coupled with the remembrance that it would not be quite *comme il faut* for the young heiress to live in obscurity with, to make the best of it, a poor English lady.

Here, then, the matter ended; our visit was a melancholy one, save on my own part, for I truly rejoiced that my amiable young friend had now no tyrannical woman to exercise authority over her.

Amid vows, then, of eternal friendship we parted; Eulalie having drawn from me a promise that in the course of the next summer I would pay her a visit at her aunt's residence in Paris.

CHAPTER XIII.—EDGAR'S REPENTANCE—HIS DEATH.

We are in London again; not much have we talked over our journey to the sunny South, and the tragic events we have witnessed during our six months' stay.

We had returned only one day, and had already seen Arthur, who had become, in many points, a better man. It was Margaret's intention to send his little girl to a superior school;—but I differed with her in opinion, for if that child grew up, highly educated, I much doubt but that she will look slightly down on the lowly origin of her mother.

As far as my unhappy brother Edgar was concerned, no news was good news, as says an old adage; and with still lighter hearts we received Eustace and his mother in the apartments which we had hired for the week, and who, taking it for granted that Margaret would not offer any fresh objections to the celebration of their nuptials, had come up with her son, in order to engage a house for the young couple. At the close of a really happy week, we returned to Ashdale, having previously instructed a person living on the spot to get things in readiness for our return. And towards the close of a fine evening in the end of May we arrived at the village.

We had been at home only one day, when my attention was excited by seeing a man who appeared scarcely able to walk, and whose clothes were in a most tattered condition, creep painfully along the gravel path that led to the house. Alas, alas! the shade of misfortune, then, is again to dash the oft-lifted cup of happiness from our lips; one gaze was sufficient—it was Edgar.

I hastened to the hall-door, and I cannot deny that words of reproach hung upon my lips. I was shocked, fearfully shocked, to think that that wretched, miserable man was still my brother.—I led him into the parlor; I saw there was no room for fear—he had come to us to die.

I was glad Margaret was away from home, in order that she might not be suddenly alarmed.—He mentioned her name; he asked would she see him?—he was dying, and had come to crave forgiveness first, and expire in our arms.

My tears fell thick and fast, as I stood over him; uncontrolled passion, drink, idleness, had brought him to this fearful pass. What could I say, but hope even now that his return was like that of the prodigal son.

Every selfish thought, indeed, was merged in the sorrowful spectacle before me; he was worn to a shadow, his cheeks were fallen in, his countenance bloodless, save where burnt a deep-red hectic spot. He told me that he had not believed that we had ultimately left Ashdale, with a view of never returning, and that he had lurked about the neighborhood for days together in hopes of seeing us yet once again before he died.

I watched for the returning Margaret, in order to break out to her what had occurred.—Poor girl, I pitied her, for her cheek paled, though with all possible care I commenced my

story. The very mention of his name awakened so many painful associations: however, her pity was awakened, and tears which at first flowed for her own distress were now freely shed for this lost, misguided brother.

It was evening ere Margaret had returned, and in the lapse of the few intervening hours I had procured all that was necessary for our dying wanderer. I had fitted up my own room for his reception, and laid his emaciated form on the bed. Food he could partake of only in small quantities, and ever and anon that hard, short cough made me think that the last struggle was nigh at hand.

It was almost dark when we entered his room; he was asleep, and Margaret drew back alarmed as she observed a faint light play around his lips, hovering over them for an instant, and then vanishing.

'He will injure us no more, Margaret,' I whispered, as I led my weeping sister from the room. 'Eustace would freely forgive him could he have witnessed his tears this morning, and seen the wretched condition he is now in.'

I could not at first imagine what could be the cause of that ghastly light, till I remembered having heard that those scintillations had been seen to play about the countenance of a young friend who had died in rapid consumption.

In the course of the evening our medical attendant called on our unhappy brother. It was as I suspected, as he himself had declared, he had but a short time to live, the doctor thought he could not survive the week. The next day he saw Margaret for the first time. A painful scene ensued between them; for he knew well how much of both bodily and mental suffering he had occasioned.

Now taking her hands within his own, he solemnly assured her that it was his firm intention, after having yielded to the temptation of forging Eustace's name, never again to cross her path, never again to see her, unless, as now, to breathe his last in her arms.

We asked him was there any wish that we could gratify, if so, to let us know what it was? He replied, yes; he would wish to see Eustace, and that when he died, if not too expensive, that we would lay his remains beside those of his wife and mother.

We assured him that all should be done as he wished, and then Margaret hastened to despatch a letter to Eustace, while I remained watching by his bedside.

Our good Eustace delayed not to comply with our request, though when I received him a shade came over his countenance, as he simply remarked,

'Another delay, Minnie—a bride may not be taken from the house of mourning.'

'Never mind,' I replied; 'cheer up, Eustace, all these trials are thrown in our way by the hand of God. You must not lose your reward, nor Margaret either, for your patience has been great. Will you see Edgar now?'

He replied in the affirmative, and I led him into my brother's room. Our poor invalid had that morning been received into the Church, and, casting all at the foot of the Cross, was tranquil, resigned, penitent, and happy. His eyes filled with tears as Eustace approached, and I heard that the voice of our good friend was tremulous from emotion, and saw the tears tremble in his eyes, as he addressed the dying man.

Raising himself with difficulty, Edgar extended his thin hand, pressing that of Eustace within his own, saying—

'I thank you much that you have come. I felt I could not die in peace unless from your own lips I received forgiveness for the injury I have done you.'

Eustace here tried to stop him, but he continued,—

'In an evil hour I yielded to a sudden temptation. Your signature lay before me. I idly seized a pen and endeavored to copy it, though without at that moment any idea of evil. I found the original exactly copied, similar in every respect, and suddenly the demon within whispered me to turn it to account. My fatal love of liquor and the gaming-table soon presented me with an occasion for testing whether I could acquire a sum of money thereby. I had unfortunately heard you in an interview with my sister mention the name of your banker. I proceeded thither, and got the amount for which I had forged your handwriting without any demur. I am confident that the suspicion I have long entertained that Arthur betrayed me was correct; for, guilty as his own conduct has been, he seemed overwhelmed with horror at the consciousness that I had become possessed of the amount which I boastfully showed him by unworthy means, that, fearing immediate exposure, I left his house directly after receiving Minnie's letter. In less than three weeks the money was expended, the greater part of it thrown away at the gaming-table, the remainder in liquor,

with which I sought to stifle the voice of conscience.

'I have no more to say, save that I beg all your prayers for me, for great has been the injury, disgrace, and grief, my reckless conduct has caused you to suffer.' Eustace had vainly endeavored to stop him many times during the confession he had made but in vain; and though he had frequently paused to regain anew his strength, he continued as I have described. It were useless for me to add, that our good friend said all he could to calm him, assured him of his entire forgiveness, and ended by insisting upon watching by him throughout the night, and on Margaret and myself retiring to rest.

It might be, perhaps, about three in the morning, when I was aroused by a gentle tap at my chamber door. I had had a vague apprehension that the life of my unhappy brother was now nearly at an end, and although there was no striking change for the worse, I had yielded to the presentiment I felt, and had thrown myself on the bed without undressing.

I felt sure that the last moment had arrived; and arousing my sister, who slept calmly beside me, I hastened to the door. Eustace was without, and his whispered 'Be quick, and call Margaret!' told me that my surmises were correct.

We hastened to the chamber of death. What a change was visible in the countenance of my unhappy brother. The unmistakable impress of death was on his features—a cold clammy dew on the face; the hour of his agony was at hand.

Oh, dreadful parting hour, when, to the struggle of the spirit to escape from its tenement of clay, is added the bitterness of thought, the consciousness of talents neglected or turned to the abuse of the Supreme Giver, the remembrance of time misapplied, remorse for the errors of a mis spent life, and all those numerous minor failings which we have perhaps counted as nothing, then rise up against us like flaming serpents! Hard was that death agony; grasping and gurgling came the short, uncertain breath, the chest heaving, as it were, in mortal agony, and the sunny light of the May morning came stealing in subdued, yet cheerily, and the little birds made melody without; but an awful contrast was presented within, for ever and anon came a moan more than mortal anguish, and the grim shadow of death grew darker and darker as it hovered over the form he claimed for his own.

And now I bethought me of his childhood's days, and again of the days of happy boyhood; and before my mind's eye arose that once handsome countenance, full of health and vigor, the eye full of animation, the features of candor and frankness, till the evil hour came, and the passions, listened to and unsubdued, then gained the mastery over sense and reason, and the white-winged angel looked sorrowfully on; but the spirit of evil triumphed, and the moment of grace had passed, and a long series of years ensued in which the voice of the tempter was harkened to, a conscience long remained lulled, but not hardened for ever, and once more, as in the days of his happy boyhood's innocence, the bright spirit looked on, and by its holy inspirations fanned alive that tiny spark, that little flame which had begun to burn again in the heart of that prodigal son, and the wanderer, touched with remorse, had turned his thoughts to his offended but long-suffering God, and his steps to those whose hearts had prayed and sighed whole years for this hour of repentance. That hour has come, and if, indeed, it be given to the spirits of the just to look on and exult at our repentance—it there is joy amongst the angels in heaven over the repentant sinner, then rejoice, ye angels! look down and exult, O Gerald, priest of God! and you, also, pure spirit of our gentle Kathleen, glorify with us on earth the mercy of our God, who hath drawn this outcast brother to Himself!

It was a scene sorely painful to note, as we did, this parting struggle, to hear the whispered cry for mercy, while the sweet name of the Redeemer hung ever on his lips. And three long hours had thus passed, when that long, loud gasp, which once heard is never forgotten, shook the frame of my dying brother. A pause ensued, again was it repeated, and then he feebly signed to us to give him a parting token of our love: and raising his hand he strove to trace the symbol of redemption.

Again that fearful gasp—but all is silent, no breath, no sigh, brook upon the ear, the eyes are fixed: he slept the sleep of death.

Peace be to his ashes, and rest to his soul!—A fearful thing, indeed, would it be, to trust to a death-bed repentance, but if ever repentance seemed contrite and unfeigned, as far as we erring mortals can judge, it was exemplified in the last days and in the death of my unhappy brother.

CHAPTER XIV.—THE BURNING MANSION—THE DROOPING FLOWER—A LADY PHILOSOPHER.

I was sitting alone in my chamber, about two months after the death of my brother, when to my astonishment I received a letter from Madame St. Aubert, containing a pressing request to me to repair immediately to her residence in Paris, for that Eulalie was very ill, and that her greatest wish was to see me. I knew not how to refuse, nor did I well know how to grant the request, for the long-deferred marriage of my sister was to take place within one month of the present time.

When Margaret entered the room I laid my difficulty before her; I saw a cloud pass over her countenance, but it quickly passed away, when I told her that I would allow no obstacle to be placed in my way, and not fail to return, at least one fortnight before the day appointed for the wedding.

Accordingly, a very few days later I left London for Paris, on arriving in which city, I proceeded immediately to the residence of Madame St. Aubert.

I was shown at once into a small but elegant boudoir, fitted up in a style of luxurious magnificence: the hangings of pale-blue satin were looped and fringed with silver; the tables were inlaid with pearl; costly vases, filled with the choicest exotics, the rarest and most delicate of their kind, were scattered around; and Madame reclined on a couch in a simple morning dress, and was reading some light work of the day when I entered.

I wonder, shall I ever conquer this absurd timidity; shall I ever acquire that calmness and self-possession so necessary for each of us in our path through life? I fear I never shall. I am so much the creature of impulse—I fancied I heard the voice of my poor young friend—the tears already stood in my eyes. I could boud forth to meet her, but the presence of the cool, collected, fashionable dame, acted beneficially on my excitable and nervous temperament, and I took the seat she offered me, and endeavored to enter into conversation as unrestrainedly as herself.

The object of Madame's invitation to myself was twofold: firstly, she wished me to spend a few months in her own home; and, secondly, she was desirous of entering into some arrangement with me, if I would consent to take Eulalie to my own English home for some little time, at least for the next two years.

'Nothing,' added Madame, 'has been left undone to reconcile this strange girl to her new position. There can be no doubt but that her mind is in a slight degree deranged, yet not so as to create any difficulty with those with whom she lives, if, indeed, she has chanced to become attached to them, as is the case with yourself.—We have tried everything; we have left her in solitude, we have surrounded her with company and with amusement, often so sought after by the young. Our efforts have, however, been vain hitherto; she appears as if she would fall into a decline; and, as she has asked for you, repeatedly, we have judged it best to beg the favor of a visit.

I bowed my acknowledgments; and then, rising, followed an attendant, who answered the summons of Madame, who used a small silver bell which stood beside her, and who now led the way to Eulalie's apartment.

Poor Eulalie looked even more delicate than ever, but sprang to meet me with a visible expression of delight. What a strange fancy for this singular girl to entertain, I thought; she is surrounded by every luxury that money can procure; we spent but a few short months together yet she seeks for my society preferably to that of those around her.

What, however, was there so singular in this if I recurred to a former period in my own life, when attracted to such a degree by the fascinating Eliza Stukaley.

But my woman's heart melted within me as Eulalie, profuse in her expressions of gratitude for my visit, whispered, 'Stay here, or let me visit England with you for awhile,' adding, 'everything is so formal and so constrained here, that I long to quit this atmosphere of fashion.'

'But you are much happier than you used to be, Eulalie,' I urged.

'Ah, yes! happier than when I was with *ma pauvre belle mere*, I must own that, indeed,' she added, with a sigh: 'but I am not happy yet. I want one like yourself, Minnie, who understands me, and will pity while she bears with my weaknesses.'

Ah, Eulalie! poor child; if it be true that those who have themselves been tried in the furnace of tribulation are more likely to bear with and pity the weaknesses of others, then hast thou chosen thy friend wisely; but when will my poor uncontrolled heart teach thee the lesson so necessary to learn; alas, alas! with passions still unsubdued, how can I teach thee how to

govern thee. But I could not refuse her request, and promised to stay yet one fortnight with them ere my return, and that, if judged wisely, I would take Eulalie back with me to England.

I had spent a week with Madame St. Aubert and her niece, and one night I had sat up later than usual, enjoying an hour spent in pursuing the pages of Ariosto; before retiring to rest I had opened my window to enjoy the calm beauty of the night; the moon was at the full, and countless myriads of stars gleamed in the heavens. The great city was buried in silence, and unnatural stillness reigned over all, which sometimes preludes the bursting of a violent storm.

Whilst I yet gazed, a cloud passed over the face of the moon, and even the slight breeze which had swept across my brow, gave place to an oppressive sultry air. I stood and watched the change; the heavens grew more and more clouded, the stars disappeared, a dense black cloud obscured the moon from my sight, the next instant a vivid flash of lightning illumined the scene, and a peal of thunder followed. I withdrew from the window, extinguished my lamp, and threw myself on my bed; I could not sleep, but I prayed that the storm might pass without any evil resulting from it.

Whilst I thus lay I fancied I distinguished the smell as of charred wood. I listened, but could distinguish no sound, save that of the wind, which had now risen, and the splashing of the rain drops against my window, with which was occasionally mingled a peal of thunder.

Still the smell arose; it filled my chamber, and now, both alarmed and surprised, I leaped from my bed, threw on a few clothes, and hastened to discover if all was safe in my room and the adjoining chamber, which gave egress to a gallery leading to the apartments occupied by Monsieur and Madame St. Aubert and their niece.

Everything was safe in each of these rooms; but as I proceeded in my search, the smell became stronger, and on opening the door leading to the gallery, I found it filled with a dense smoke, and distinctly heard the crackling of wood at no great distance.

I knew not which were the rooms occupied by the owners of the mansion, but as I flew along the already heated boards to Eulalie's apartment I gave the alarm of fire. I tried the door: it was fastened; she was asleep. Ah, how heavily youth sleeps—how well those sleep, I thought, who dream not as I have dreamt, of the harassing cares of the morrow, the dawn of which the children of poverty dread. I called loudly on her name; now I heard voices in the distance, but a moment more and relief would be too late, and with an almost superhuman effort, unaided and alone, I forced open the door, wrenched aside the slight bolt which Eulalie had unfortunately fastened. But my sight was almost blinded; it was evident that if the fire had not originated there, it had taken place in the immediate vicinity; still, on the bed, surrounded by the flame, which crept quickly over her, lay the insensible form of the unfortunate girl. Gifted for the moment with courage and strength not naturally mine, I tore her from the bed, and pulling off a thick shawl from my own person, I threw it over her, with the hope of checking the flames, dragging her to the gallery and shrieking loudly for assistance, for I felt that my own hands were burnt. I knew I myself was in danger, and hailed with joy the appearance of a couple of servants, who quickly extinguished the flames.

Now arose a scene of confusion and dismay: it was evident to all that this wing of the building had been struck with lightning, and it was some time before the fire could be stayed from penetrating to the centre of this extensive building. Meanwhile, Madame and myself had removed to a place of safety in the neighborhood, till the return of morning should make known what steps were best to pursue.

Poor Eulalie was, however, frightfully burned; her agony was extreme. She would not spare me out of her sight; and when medical advice was called in, the opinion expressed was that she would not survive the combined effects of the shock and the burns she had received.

I wrote to Margaret at the end of a week after this sad accident. I told her that this sweet girl was slowly, but gradually dying, and that so long as I arrived home in time for the wedding-day, she must rest content. Poor girl, I pitied her, but I know that Lucy and Ellen Maxwell would endeavor to make up for my absence.

I do not think Eulalie would have lived long, had not this fearful accident taken place. She had evidently inherited her mother's infirmity—consumption; and the sad trials of her early youth, and the tyranny of her stepmother had, no doubt accelerated the progress of this dreadful malady.

I have watched her often, as she reclined on a couch; her long golden hair playing round her