

"I beg your pardon," answered Carleton, "no one person in the nineteenth century has had such influence, direct, and indirect, not only on her ministers, and her own country, but on the world at large. Over and over again the Government have deferred to her, not because she is an autocrat, but because experience had proved her immense wisdom and wide knowledge of diplomacy were seldom at fault. The wars she has prevented, the progress in civilization she has made possible will never be fully understood. It will be a black day for the world when she closes her unprecedented reign, and as for the Empire, one can scarcely imagine what it will do without her."

"She is certainly the most remarkable and tactful ruler the world has seen," said another, "but do you think loyalty to the throne in the abstract is as strong as ever in these democratic days?"

"That, of course, is a matter of opinion which time alone can decide," Carleton replied, "but if England ever elects to have another form of government, it will be because of the gracious life of the Queen, holy, I had almost said. As woman, wife, mother, and sovereign, she has set up such a standard that it will be difficult for succeeding monarchs to approach it, and yet, having had such a 'figure head,' as you call her, for sixty-two years, the nation will not tolerate a ruler who should come very far short of this ideal."

"Certainly you are loyal over here," remarked a third speaker. "I had no idea of the depth of Colonial feeling till I travelled through the country in 1897, during the celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Not a child but wore some little flag or souvenir ornament, and I have seen the congregations sing, 'God Save the Queen,' with heart and soul, many who had never seen her, with tears in their eyes."

"Yes, loyalty is the air we breathe. We Canadians 'abide by our mother's house,'" said old Mr. Stanton, "and 'the little old lady in black,' as we sometimes call her, with no irreverence, is as living a personality as though we saw her daily. I don't know whether you have heard that her birthday is to be kept a perpetual holiday in Canada, under the name of Victoria Day. Nor can you wonder at this loyalty, for her noble character, her blameless life, her love for her sailors and soldiers, and her deep sympathy for any form of distress among her subjects, have endeared her to all classes and creeds, from the Indian or African native who worship her as the 'Great White Queen,' to the little cockney urchin who says 'Er Majesty, 'eaven bless'er.'"

"The Queen ought to hear you," said Aline, speaking for the first time. "My father was English, you know, and took me to London when I was a child, and I remember one day being told I was going to see the greatest and best woman in the world, and when she drove along the street, people cheering and bowing on every side, she smiled so sweetly on them all that I loved her at once, and American as I am, have always revered her since."

"Yes, poets, statesmen, writers, the heads of the churches, her fellow-sovereigns, and all the greatest and best men and women who have lived during her wonderful reign, and have closest opportunities of knowing her inner life, have all testified their admiration and love in unqualified terms," said Mr.

Stanton. "I often think the petitions we read day after day in our prayer-books ought to be changed to thanksgivings that every prayer has been so absolutely and marvellously fulfilled. If I hear an ignoramus occasionally utter a slighting remark about the Queen's qualities of heart or head, it makes me perfectly rabid. I long to put such criminals (for it is a crime) back into the reigns of the Second Charles or Fourth George, and let them get a thorough understanding of the difference that a bad sovereign can make to the country, to cure them of their cavilling, and make them sadder, but wiser individuals. I was reading to-day a little incident which is worthy to rank beside the thousands of kind acts which have beautified every hour of the Queen's life—a life devoted entirely, since the death of her beloved husband, to her country and people. She was in a military hospital, decorating some soldiers who had been wounded in one of the late battles. Darghai or Omdurman, and as she pinned the Victoria Cross on the breast of one stalwart fellow who had won it by an act of conspicuous bravery, he was so overcome that he suddenly burst into tears, and the Queen laid her hand gently on his head, spoke a few words which were full reward for all his danger and suffering, and then passed on, blessing and being blessed. No wonder we love her! And the old gentleman brought his eulogium to an end by rising abruptly, and looking out of the window."

Presently the band struck up in the Pavilion, and the groups dispersed to wander in twos and threes on the Terrace. Carleton turned to Aline, and said in a masterful tone she had never heard before: "Come up to your favorite seat under the King's Bastion; I have something to say to you." And without a word she obediently put on her hat, and they went, "both of them together," up the steep Glacis to the "Point."

CHAPTER XX.

Slowly, and almost in silence, they climbed the grassy slope. Slowly, because Carleton was still lame; slowly, because there was no need for haste; slowly also, because certain things lose an indefinite charm by the rude touch of speech:

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter."

Once Aline paused, with head bent forward a little and gazed long on the darkening city below her, while Carleton stood silently at her side. The hills in the distance had faded away into infinity, the bright lights of Levis marked the other shore, and between swung the frigates, outlined by their signal lanterns, and now and again a mellow bugle call floated across the water. The lamps of the Lower Town twinkled in the half gloom, a swarm of people hustled along the Terrace under the illuminated Chateau, and from the city an electric glare shot up into the sky.

Aline knew that up there, under the King's Bastion, she was going to sign away her freedom. She would do it voluntarily—gladly. And yet—and yet!—her girlhood days had been very happy, she could look back on them all with pleasure, and now she stood at the parting of the ways.

Perhaps every girl feels thus at some time before her marriage, no matter how much she may be capable of losing, as the brook hesi-

tates and curls itself backward, even while taking the final leap into the unknown river. With a man it is different. He always gains something in marriage and need not—most frequently does not—give up any of his former life. It is to him merely an "episode" in his career, of more or less importance. But for a woman there is no return. She gives herself, and with the gift her life, even in the happiest circumstances, passes beyond her control.

Something of all this stole dimly upon the girl as her eyes dwelt on the landscape without heeding it. A mood enthralled her of which a poet wrote:

"'Tis as much akin to sorrow,
As the morrow
Holdeth thought of yesterday."

Then roused from her reverie by the magnetic influence of Carleton's presence, she moved on again, and set her face toward the days that were to be, and then when they stood at last up above the throng half way 'twixt earth and sky, Aline's heart beat quickly, and she began to talk fast and gaily of the scene below, as women will play with assured happiness, and hinder, if but for a moment, the declaration from a man's lips.

"I can't understand," said she, "how people who belong to Quebec can prefer other cities, remarkable only for the number of the population, the size of the stores, the number of factory chimneys, or the export of pork (like the old man who was talking of Chicago this evening). It is something to live in a place which reminds one every day of great deeds done in the past. If those who go away really lose interest in Quebec, it must mean a lowering of their whole nature. It seems to me Quebecers ought to have very elevated instincts from having around them so much that is noble in nature, and inspiring in history. Are you *all* finer characters here than elsewhere?" she asked humorously, looking at Carleton.

But the question was forgotten, and if unanswered neither of them thought of it again, for Aline felt her unresisting hands taken in a firm clasp, and a manly voice said with a tremor of earnestness: "Aline—dearest—will you come to live in Quebec—with me. I love you so much, dear, that I cannot do without you. Can you care for me enough to marry me?"

"I think you know I do," she answered softly.

"I have never felt sure of you, and I can scarcely believe now that I am such a happy fellow. Are you quite sure you care? You see you have known me such a short time," he enquired anxiously.

"Exactly the same length of time to a minute, that you have known me," she retorted, smiling.

"Ah! but darling, think of the difference between us. And I fell in love with you the first time I saw you. Do you remember you were trying to find the Chien d'Or?"

Aline remembered, and then, before he was quite convinced that it was all reality, she had to repeat after him a sentence which he composed for her, something like this: "Carleton—dear—I love you," and she said it so sweetly that he was fain to reward her as warmly as he knew how. And so hand in hand they drifted off into the lover's talk, which is in its general outlines a universal language all the world over, consisting chiefly