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For the Pearl.

ALICE WARE.*

My effort to hide my tears was but in part effectual—she saw that I was much moved, and guessed the cause; for she said, as I requested her to take a seat beside me, “Ah! Mr. B. you are shocked at the wreck of youth, and health and innocence, but you are very kind to weep for a wretch like me—it is painful to see you so affected, and yet it is pleasant to meet, even for a moment, with one human being, who does not find in our offences an excuse for altogether hardening his heart against us.”

“We often play the Judge,” I replied, “upon the frailties of our fellow creatures, without remembering that we are moulded of the same clay, and bound to be merciful to each other, as our Father in Heaven is merciful to us all. But, tell me, how came you to leave your friends, and as I always supposed, happy home?”

“It is a long story, and I fear to detain you—and besides, it is the old one, with which, as a man of the world—a reader of books—and a student of human life, you are sufficiently familiar—girlish vanity and waywardness leading to sin, and sorrow, and debasement.”

“Perhaps so,” said I, “but tell me yours, for I would fain understand your position, that I may try to be of service—and I should be fit for nothing else this evening if we parted now. Until we met to-day, I had supposed you married, and comfortably settled at some of the outports, or in one of the adjoining provinces—I never suspected that the beautiful girl I knew in boyhood was a wanderer in a strange land, and indeed I never heard any thing improper coupled with your name.”

“I am glad of it—that is indeed a cordial in my cup of bitterness—for I have had my fears on that head. I have often thought that I could face the worst that evil fortune has yet in store for me, and lay down my head, as I probably shall, in a ditch, if assured that no suspicion of my folly or my fate had penetrated into the place of my birth—brought shame upon my family, and made me a mockery and a byword among my old companions. Nothing but my anxiety to ascertain the fact tempted me to accost you to-day; and though the risk was great, I hoped that, as a man of honour, my secret would be safe in your keeping.”

What an unravelled mystery is the human heart! Here was a poor creature, that every one of the thousands who passed her on the street would have concluded was dead to all sense of shame; and divested of every natural feeling, nourishing, in fact living on the hope, that no touch of her pollution had soiled her early home, that, in the judgment of the vicinage which surrounded it, she was still worthy of respect; and that, if remembered at all, it was as the virtuous and the beautiful Alice Ware, such as she had dwelt upon my memory until that very afternoon. This feeling it is that, operating powerfully over a large extent of country, gathers into the great cities such accumulations of vice. The village shop-boy, suspected of taking a shilling from his master's till, and unable to brave the cold looks of old friends and the jeers of young companions, rushes into a city, where the vicious have a community of their own, to become an abandoned thief—and the wretched girl, who with brazen brow passes and smiles upon hundreds of thousands in one day in Bond street or the Strand, would not for half the wealth its shops contain, take one turn through the quiet town in which she was born.

After an assurance that she was not detaining, and would much interest me, by telling me her story, she commenced a narrative that riveted my attention for several hours, and which was only broken by bursts of strong feeling that at times threatened to shiver her frame to pieces. Though all unused to the melting mood, I found myself every now and then sobbing like a child, at some untoward passage of her life—and again wondering at the shrewdness of observation acquired in years of suffering and practical experience of the world. To tell her story as she told it to me would occupy a volume, and perhaps in the multitude of incidents the object for which it is told at all, that of reading a useful lesson to the inexperienced, might be overlooked. An outline is therefore all that I shall attempt.

“You knew my father,” said she, “a plain, simple minded, but intelligent and very industrious man—who laboured hard because he had been bred to labour, and saved, because he had few wants and no vices. Upon the comforts and the embellishments

of our humble dwelling, nothing was spared that was necessary or becoming; and in the education and training of his children he was more than liberal. Not that he had any higher views for them than that they should become worthy members of his own class. My mother, though she resembled him in many things, and seconded most assiduously his efforts to better our fortunes, differed from him in one respect—she had a strong, but slightly developed, and almost unconfessed desire, that her children should rise above their order, and by some lucky stroke of fortune, become ladies and gentlemen for life. This hope sweetened her toil, and stimulated her to strain every nerve to give us those little accomplishments, which the limited resources of Halifax at that time placed within our reach. The ruling passion, however artfully it may be concealed, will discover itself by a thousand little indications, which, like straws upon the surface, show how the stream sets; whose steady volume is sure to determine the direction of every thing within its influence. In the daily and hourly intercourse of a mother with her family, a thousand things occur to impress her opinions upon them—and, unfortunately for me, my disposition, and much in the circumstances of the period, prepared me to cling to my mother's favourite idea of social exaltation. When I grew up, as you perhaps remember, my figure was good, and my features not inexpressive; as I had amply shared the advantages which all possessed, I was enabled to make the most of both—and, as some fortunate hits had been made by Halifax girls marrying into the army and navy, I flattered myself with the hope, that, as my accomplishments were quite equal, and my personal attractions not inferior to theirs, the exaltation which my mother predicted would probably come upon me in that direction.

“Did you know young Mavor?” said she.

“Yes.”

“Is he still alive?”

“He is—he has been married some years, has thriven, is very much esteemed, a director of a bank, and indeed one of our most substantial and highly respected citizens.”

“He lived next to us—loved, and would have married me. But he was poor at the time—rich in health, industry, principle—with an agreeable person and good address,—but only just upon our level, not above it. I respected, liked, may almost say, was sincerely attached to him,—and perhaps as I grew older, and his circumstances improved, we might have married, but for an incident which I have every reason to deplore, for it decided my fate. It was at a Militia ball, one of those rather promiscuous, but very delightful, gatherings of the young and old of all ranks and classes, to which we used to look forward with so much pleasure, that I happened to attract the attention of Lieut. L. of the —d Regiment, at that time stationed in Halifax. Through the old Doctor, who attended our family, he obtained an introduction—asked me to dance—and in a few minutes, for the first time in my life, I was hanging on the arm, not of a Militia but of an Army officer—a lieutenant of the line, with a scarlet coat, and an epaulette on his shoulder.”

“I can understand your feelings,” said I; “for I have seen them in full play on many as young and thoughtless a thousand times. A red coat and a bit of gold lace, though spread above a form as ungainly, and a heart as rotten, as ever disgraced humanity, to this hour, in the estimation of half the girls in Halifax, will outweigh the most solid and noble qualities of their old schoolfellows, companions and equals, whose dress is not quite so gaudy,—and the consequence is, that dozens of them flirt with the military until the young men of their own class plunge, to please them, into follies they cannot so well sustain; or turn aside in disgust, and leave them to mourn in a long “winter of discontent,” and joyless solitude, the time wasted in life's opening spring. The consequence of all this is, that what with those who have acquired dissipated and expensive habits, and are too poor to marry, and others who will not condescend to take those who have once trifled with and slighted their affection, there are more old maids in our good town than in almost any other of its population in the world.”

“Human nature is true to itself every where,” observed my companion; “and I am sorry that in this respect Halifax is so little changed. But oh! sir, you are going back among them—I dare not go, or I could preach from my own experience of the text; but you may have many opportunities, and do not fail to improve them—of pointing to this their resetting sin—the peculiar misfortune I may call it, for I have seen several, of every garrison town. I can estimate the danger of the temptation, for I know how it bewildered me. Lieutenant L. was not handsome, but he was an officer—was above me in rank, as the world is classed by the world—and I knew, as he led me down the dance, or sat

beside me pouring flattery into my ear, that I was the envy of all my young companions, and perhaps of some even in circles above me, whose personal charms had failed to command such homage. My heart was not touched, but my vanity was gratified, and a prospect seemed opening before me that promised to realize my own youthful visions, and my mother's long cherished hopes. On that night I enjoyed my triumph to the full; my new friend never left my side, until at a late hour, and when my father's indulgent good humour was nearly exhausted, I was obliged to bid him adieu.

“After this we met frequently: at first by accident, and then by appointment. I did not for a long time venture to bring him to the house, for my father, who had a high opinion of his young neighbour, and indulged no anticipations beyond seeing his daughter a decent tradesman's wife, set his face resolutely but calmly against any renewal of the intercourse. But my mother, whom I considered a much better judge in these matters, though she said little, was evidently aware that my admirer still continued his attentions—and while she gave abundance of hints, which were shrewd enough, so far as her knowledge of the world extended, never dreamed that neither her own nor my education or training fitted us to cope with the arts of one practised in all the blandishments and disguises of fashionable society, and fortified by the conventional morality of a mess, that would have laughed at a man for marrying a portionless girl, but applauded his talent if he only seduced her.

“Mavor at first rallied me upon my new conquest, and tried to laugh me out of it; but finding me incorrigible, and being stung by the slight recognition he received when he met me in company with L. changed his manner towards me, and never tendered aught but the most distant courtesy again. Indeed all those of whose attentions I ought to have been proud, and from among whom I should have selected a husband, feeling that they had no chance in a contest so unequal, followed his example; and the Lieutenant had the field to himself. No man was ever better calculated to improve his advantages—particularly with a person so young, and so utterly inexperienced as I was. He never loved me, unless as Byron declares, “love is lust,” but from the first looked upon me as a victim, and played upon what he saw was my ruling passion until he wound me into the toils, and made me stoop to falsehood and deception, that I might hoodwink one parent, and seem to have fulfilled the wishes of the other—and maintain in the eyes of my young companions a delusion, which must be kept up if I were still to excite their envy, and save myself from utter contempt. He promised marriage, but still, under one pretext or other, put off the time—first to endeavour to overcome the prejudices of his family, which he said was wealthy and well descended—and then, to wait for the promotion which was necessary to enable him to support a wife without their assistance. Time wore on, and although my virtue was still preserved, you may easily perceive that mine was no safe or enviable position—at length he obtained leave of absence for several months, and under the most solemn pledges that we should be married the day I arrived, induced me to join him at St. Andrews. To this in an evil hour I consented, and the step sealed my destruction. Once fairly in his power—return to my home being impossible, and I having no other resource but his generosity—no other human being to whom I could cling for protection, he dwelt upon and magnified all the difficulties which stood in the way of an immediate marriage: without the assistance of his friends his promotion would be delayed, particularly as his commanding officer, himself a disappointed bachelor, would be incensed at a step so imprudent—and besides, where was the necessity—loving as we did—and having the most unbounded reliance upon each other, to deny ourselves the gratifications that were within our reach, or by any premature act of mere worldly ceremony, put off the period when, in the enjoyment of the rank and the fortune which would assuredly be ours, we could justify by the success of our plans any temporary deviations from mere conventional rectitude. But why need I repeat reasons that now appear as burnt flax, but which at the time seemed as strong as adamant, and as plausible as truth itself?—It is enough to say that the morrow's sun rose not upon a married woman—but upon another victim of the same arts and the same arguments by which thousands before and since have been beguiled to their destruction.”

Here, though she vainly endeavoured to suppress her emotion, her sobs were audible, and the seat shook with the convulsive action of her frame.

PEREGRINE.

To be concluded in next No.

*Continued from p. 212.