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EUSTACE;

SELF-DEVOTION.

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

'Not another word, dear mademoiselle,' replied the lady, handing me a paper as she spoke. 'You will not, I am sure, refuse the dying gift of our beloved niece; for, but for your courage and presence of mind, the entire mansion, instead of only one wing, would have been consumed on that fearful night, and our dear Eulalie have perished in the flames. This deed,' she added, 'will place a large sum at your disposal, as a legacy of love and gratitude, bequeathed by Eulalie de Villecourt out of the fortune which, on her death, will revert to myself. We are already rich, mademoiselle, and as a trifling testimony of respect, you will see that Monsieur de Aubert has added the sum of 3,000 francs to that bequeathed you by dear Eulalie.'

I opened, and read: did my eyes deceive me? No; Eulalie had bequeathed me the sum of 90,000 francs. I burst into tears, tears of mingled gratitude and love; and whilst I stood silently weeping, madame withdrew, and I heard the soft voice of Eulalie calling me by name.

I struggled to assume a calmness my poor heart did not feel; and, approaching the bed-side with the paper in my hand, kissed her forehead, saying—

'Words will not express what I feel, *ma mignonne*. Ah, would that my efforts could save you—would that you might have lived to cheer me with your presence!'

'It may not be, *ma chère Minnie*,' she replied; 'for my fiat has gone forth, and I must needs rejoice that God has called me to you glorious heavens so early. I cannot tell you, my own loving friend, how happy it has made me to be able to leave you this poor testimony of my affection and my love.'

I withdrew from her bedside: I could not restrain my tears. I felt as if they would choke me, such conflicting emotions crowded in upon my mind. My poor Eulalie, whom I had long learned to love, dying before my eyes—my dear father's form rising up to my mind's eyes. Ah! I felt as all must feel who have seen some dear one die in sorrow and distress. It was a moment in which joy and sorrow met together—sorrow deep and bitter that that innocent girl, with whom I had promised myself such happy days, was about to be snatched thus suddenly from me—joy to think that now I possessed the means of making others happy.

When next I turned to the bed, Eulalie slept,—that deep, calm sleep in which we often thought the pure soul would wing its flight to eternity.

Purity herself in all its matchless loveliness, she grasped its type within her own long fingers, in which lay a white rose, which, by her request, I had given her that morning. An image of surpassing beauty and peace was presented to my mind; and, as I stood and gazed on that sleeping form, my ideas clothed themselves in the following simple words:—

Softly, softly sleep, thou child of Eve,
For night wanes fast, the dawn of day is near,
And angels' hands thy spirit shall receive—
Thou mayest go forth without one pang or fear.

Like fleeting sunbeam of an April day,
Faint as the rose-bud on the tender tree,
Short-lived as dew-drops 'neath the sun's bright ray:
So like to these seems thy young life to be.

The bridegroom tarrieth, virgin wise and pure:
Haeste, child of Eve, tress up thy golden hair;
Thy lamp is ready lit, thy path secure,
Thy brave young heart; it knows no coward fear.

Why mourn we one like thee, too pure for earth?
Far brighter regions thou may'st soon adorn.
Go claim the crown, thou child of mortal birth,
For, ah! the cross thou hast full nobly borne!

Truly, that young girl was the type of patience and purity—one of those, in short, of whom, in vulgar parlance, we have heard it said, 'he or she was too good to live.'

Day by day she faded, like some young spring flower too tender to resist the cutting blast of the keen north wind. There was a something so gentle, so ethereal in Eulalie's nature, that one could not choose but love. I question whether Madame St. Aubert had much heart, or much love to bestow on any one, till her visit to the chateau. Her marriage had been solely one of convenience; her time was passed in a continual routine of dissipation—one unceasing whirl of fashionable amusement and folly, the opera or ball generally closing the day.

But the arrival of her niece into her family made some little alteration in the conduct of the worldly aunt. She had unblushingly vowed herself a freethinker in matters of religion. Her infidelity was as great as that of the worst of the French philosophers, whose works she had perused with the greatest avidity; but from birth and education she was a lady, and her wealth, throwing her in contact with the fashionable world of Paris, had helped to throw a veil and

gloss over opinions which would have been offensive and disgusting had they betrayed themselves in the character of any woman in the lower orders; and she now began to look a little into herself and her own heart.

Madame St. Aubert was still a handsome woman, but fast falling into the vale of years;—and the moods which those years had made in her person she took considerable pains to disguise, as far as cosmetics, rouge, and other artificial helps could afford her any aid.

When I met madame in the South, she was a far different person. I question, had religion been mooted in any way, that the principles she later hesitated not to avow she entertained to her niece would have been so unblushingly put forth to a stranger. She was, in fact, an infidel to the heart's core; and when I say an infidel, I mean so; a very different person indeed to any English member of the Roman Catholic or Anglican Churches, who might have thrown aside their faith. No, Madame de St. Aubert was a thorough systematic infidel; she had the dangerous writings of Rousseau and Voltaire by heart; in her eyes, religion was but another word for weakness of mind and feebleness of intellect;—she derided its ministers, and mocked at its solemnities. Yet, shall it be owned, that this woman, with a hardened conscience, who worshipped her own intellect, setting up the idol self to be adored in lieu of the Supreme Being, had been, in early youth, a model of piety and virtue.

But at the age of sixteen she married a wealthy man much older than herself. Monsieur St. Aubert was at heart neither more nor less than a practical atheist; the young girl listened;—liberty was more acceptable than restraint; the insidious poison infected her mind; and the lessons of Voltaire were sweeter than those of the Gospel, which imposed restraint. To feast well was far more pleasant than to fast; to listen to the voice of self-love better than the admonitions of the priest in the confessional; and thus Madame St. Aubert and a few infidel friends soon gained over to the ranks of the Evil One the beautiful girl who played with the danger till she had well nigh perished in it.

But after many years God sent to save this soul, who was so near being shipwrecked, one fair spring flower, whom he meant to crop very early out of the garden of this world, where it had flourished amidst thorns and brambles, for his own bright realms above.

This fair flower was our gentle Eulalie; her intellect was far keener, poor girl, than either 'la belle mère,' or madame suspected, but she saw the evil, and wisely sought to stem the torrent by a right example rather than by many words.

At first, madame's endeavors were turned to making a disciple of Eulalie. She found the young girl more than her match; she saw that all hopes of making a proselyte in this quarter were vain; but she placed every obstacle in her niece's way that she could possibly devise. To go to church was folly; to receive the sacraments, worse; to see Monsieur le Cure when Eulalie was ill, was worse still—simply it could not be thought of; but patient endeavor will effect far more than words. Eulalie prayed, waited her time, and argued not. I interceded for her with her aunt. Madame was ashamed to hold out, especially as, just then, she had a point to gain with me, for it was previous to the sad calamity which had taken place; she yielded an unwilling assent, and retired, like a discomfited general, from the field of battle.

One great point was gained; more would follow quickly. I often smiled, when I noticed that madame invariably hurried from her niece's room whenever the priest was about to enter. This showed me that she remembered old times; and though she would deride the ministers of religion in speaking of them, she had still some faint spark left within her of the sentiments of her earlier days, and loved better to act on the defensive than the offensive.

But the evening of a pure fresh life was wanting to its close. On this earth, Eulalie, there shall be no more morrow's dawn for thee: thy matins shall be sung with God's own angels in the starry heavens above.

Slowly and softly cometh the hand of the angel of death; and as I sat beside the bed and gazed on that face, white as monumental marble, I noticed that one great change, which once seen can never be mistaken.

I hastened for Madame St. Aubert; her husband was absent; she accompanied me to the bedside of her niece; she wept much, and taking the young girl's hand within her own, she asked her if there was any wish yet unfulfilled which she could grant.

'Yes,' feebly replied the dying girl; 'one request you have it indeed in your power to grant. It is,' she added, 'that when you visit the Chateau de Villecourt, you will seek for a small, gold cross, which you will find in an ebony cabinet among some jewels of my mother's and wear

it for my sake; and throw not at my request, dearest aunt. Oh, promise me that you will return to the religion you have abandoned.'

'I will think about it, dear Eulalie,' said madame, in a voice husky from emotion; 'and in dying, rest assured that your bright example has done far more toward recalling the remembrance of happier days than those I at present enjoy.'

A smile of ineffable peace spread itself over Eulalie's countenance. A gentle tap was heard at the door; it was the cure: this time madame did not withdraw.

Pass away, bright spirit, from this cold earth! Rejoice, for the hour of thy transit is at hand! Hark, afar in the distance we hear the murmuring and subdued sounds which issue from a great city; they steal but softly on the ear; and in the mansion, servants glide noiselessly to and fro, for death reigns therein!

Nought is heard in the chamber but the deep, sonorous voice of the priest; the last rites have been administered, and he bids the soul go forth in peace to the God who gave it.

Madame kneels at the foot of the bed, and bends in lowly adoration, and under sacramental veils she acknowledges and feels, as in times gone past, that wondrous mystery of the presence of the Lord. I hear that smothered sob, I know that the pride of her infidel heart is smothered; that the prayers of the dying girl have been born to heaven by its own bright angels; that the incense of her sweet example hath saved a soul.

No sharp struggle was hers; yet, like the fitful gleam of an expiring taper, ever and anon she wrestled in the arms of death. Once we thought that all was over; but no, a faint sigh told us that the immortal spirit had not yet freed itself from its tenement of clay, and a feeble pressure of my hand warned me that her soul yet hung as it were on the confines of eternity. Again I pressed my lips to the cold forehead; I clasped the hand, no pressure was returned, and with our faint sigh the bright spirit passed to fairer home.

What more have I to say, save that, when offering up my prayers, after the interment had taken place in the Church of Notre Dame, at which a requiem had been sung for the repose of the soul of Eulalie de Villecourt, I beheld the proud Madame St. Aubert emerge from the confessional of the cure who had attended the dying moments of Eulalie. I left Paris that same day. She wept when I bade her farewell, and her last words were, 'Pray for me, mademoiselle.' A wondrous change has crept over me since the death of my niece. I am happier than I have been since the days of my childhood.

I knew to what she reverted, but forbore to press any questions, thinking it wiser to leave her to the dictates of her own awakened conscience, and the admonitions of the cure.

CHAPTER XV.—MINNIE'S FAREWELL.

I intended to pass a few hours with Arthur on my return home; for, during my residence in Paris I had received a letter from Eustace telling me that he had succeeded in obtaining an appointment for him in a mercantile house in Australia, and he had conducted himself so much more quietly lately, that I felt no small degree of pleasure at the communication of such good tidings.

Moreover, I had it in my power to make him a handsome present, previous to his departure, and at the moment that I placed it in his hands, the thought of my beloved Eulalie was foremost in my mind; for the power to confer that gift came in fact from her.

I found his wife improved in every sense of the word, yet must I own the truth—I could never, when I accidentally met this woman, fail to remember poor Maggie's adventure one sad Christmas Eve, when she first had the honor of becoming acquainted with her sister-in-law.

The children was as good-looking as they were good-humored; poverty and an empty cupboard sadly tries the temper, especially if drunkenness reign supreme. Sobriety and industry had now resumed their sway; with these virtues came increased means, and consequently, softened tempers, and more placable dispositions.

I am again at Ashdale, and the morning following my arrival, while Maggie is busy with her bridal preparations, I take my pen in hand, and hasten to discharge a duty alike gratifying to my own feelings as in accordance with the rules of justice and honor.

Eulalie's handsome and generous bequest was more than sufficient for my unambitious wants; why should I continue a pensioner on the civil list? why should I take to myself that little income which now be better bestowed elsewhere? I will not say my pride revolted at continuing to receive it, because if that pride by which I am unhappily too often led had a share therein, it was more than balanced by a purely honorable feeling, the sense of justice, which taught me that to continue to receive a pecuniary favor, if by any possibility it can be dispensed with, is an

injury to the bounty of the donor, who might, if he knew the case, carry his relief elsewhere as it is disgraceful and humiliating to the recipient.

A rightly-constituted mind must surely shrink from receiving such favors unless sorely tried, when it becomes our duty to accept with gratitude and thankfulness those aids which God shall place in the way of the afflicted, by inspiring others to follow his example by the exercise of work of mercy. 'Go and do thou in like manner,' were words pronounced by the lips of unerring wisdom, and cold as is the world, yet many there are still who are ever ready to stretch out their hands to assist the afflicted.

In a few brief lines, then, I stated that the legacy of a friend had placed me far beyond the reach of pecuniary distress, and that I felt gratified at being able to say that I should cease to draw my quarterly pension, which might revert to some one really in need, whilst I begged to render my sincere and warm thanks for the aid which in the hour of need, had been so generously extended towards me.

I needed, indeed, not the words of others to tell me I acted rightly; yet, as Eustace glanced his eye over the superscription, I felt pleased at his remark, 'Quite right, Minnie, I should have done the same, in your place.'

The following day Margaret's wedding took place, a short account of which I have given in the first chapter of this autobiography. I expect her home daily, and am about, in accordance with their wishes, to pass a few months, at least, in the metropolis.

Reader, the human heart must always yearn for something; there will ever be a void remain unfilled of one kind or another. I think of Eulalie, and my heart grows sad, yet why? for she is happy, and has but trod the passage of the valley of death a short time before I myself must descend thither. Debility of health, those heavy languors and lassitudes, which are known but to a few, decree that my life should be spent only in such retirement as the world can bestow; and when I wish for society it will be mine in many a happy day spent in the home of my beloved Maggie. And when the spirit, long worn with the toils and anxieties of life, sighs for solitude and calm, ah! then I know of a certain rustic spot in the fair county of Kent, to which, as at Ashdale, so sorrowful remembrance clings; and there are heaped together music, and birds, and books, and flowers, and all those many trifles which tell of the presence of woman, and that she loves them far more than crowded assemblies and heated rooms, and the whirl of the giddy world. Here, too, will often be seen a fair young girl, whose inheritance is poverty; she springs from the genteel middle class, that class who most severely feel the sting of distress. I resolved to snatch some one young girl from the sad misfortune attendant on my own early youth and in this one action I experienced the greatest enjoyment I have ever known.

What have I—what can I wish for more?—For, sad as my life has been, yet the end of my tale, for I shall keep no further record, is bright when, to others, no friendly ray lightens them on their tedious journey; for, alas! mine is the exception to the general rule, not the criterion, unfortunately for those that have gone before or may follow.

Farewell, then, dear reader; may I venture to hope that in this, alas, too true record of human hopes, and fears, and anxieties, in which the stern severity of truth has borne a greater share by far than has been drawn from the fairy realms of fiction, that my tale has not wearied you; that by egotism I have not disgusted where I have occasionally sought to amuse, or perchance to soften your hearts by the recital of the every-day sorrows of life from which a happier fate may have protected you; that the sequel to self-conquest, having for its moral the virtue of self-denial, may find grace in your eyes; for, gentle reader, I venture to assure, that there is many a Eustace, and many a Gerald too, in this our land whose domestic unobtrusive virtues none shall know, till their good deeds are fully manifested at the great accounting day.

Once again, then, farewell, gentle reader. If my tale has drawn one tear of sympathy from your eyes for sorrows, alas, too real, or its lighter portions have beguiled one weary hour, your humble servant, Minnie, is content.

THE END.

THE TWO SISTERS OF COLOGNE.

More than forty years ago I was a poor art-student, journeying over Europe, with a knapsack on my back, having resolved to visit, if possible, every gallery worth a painter's study. I started with but a few shillings in my pocket; but I had colors and brushes, strength of limb, and determination of heart. It was my practice, on entering a town, to offer to paint a portrait, in exchange for so many days' bed and board; or, when I found no man's vanity to be thus played upon, I applied at all the likeliest shops, and I seldom failed of work. Thus I was enabled to

carry out my scheme, while most of my fellow-students were vegetating where I had left them, with minds unenlarged by contact with the men and the arts of other countries. Though I left England with a heavy heart—for I was leaving behind me the hope and promise of life—and though I was away on my walk through Europe more than two years, 'in weariness' and 'in fastings often,' yet I never envied the unambitious routine, the inglorious repose, of my less enterprising friends. I was constantly obliged to go without a dinner, when a turn of ill-luck (some temporary illness, or the artistic obtuseness of a whole city) had drained my purse very low; but I seldom lost courage—courage and a confident hope in the future.

I was nearly in this plight, however, when I entered Cologne late one evening in September. I had been laid up at Dusseldorf for many days, with low fever, and the belt in which I had carried my thalers round my waist had been much lightened in consequence. My illness had left me weak; and I crawled into the town dusty and footsore. Twilight was gathering around the many spires and towers as I crossed the bridge of boats; a dark ruddy light alone remained in the calm river, where shadows were fastening into black; and the reflection of a candle here and there flickered in long scales of gold upon the water. It was very hot. I sat down on a stone outside the cathedral, too exhausted to go from pillar to post, bargaining for a bed, as was my wont. I pulled a crust and bunch of grapes from my wallet. Vespers were going forward, as I knew from seeing some people going up the steps and disappearing through the heavy leathern door. It occurred to me, after a while, to follow them. It would be pleasanter than outside: the soothing influence of music, the luxury of a straw-bottomed chair—these were the attractions, I fear, that drew me in. Heaven knows I was properly punished, inasmuch as I can never again hear Cologne Cathedral named without a shudder.

There were but few persons present, and those were huddled together in one of the side-chapels, dimly lighted by half a dozen candles upon the altar where the priest was officiating. The only other light throughout the great shadowy pile was given forth by a lamp or candle here and there, burning before the Mother of Sorrows, or some smaller shrine, and struggling out into the great sea of darkness fast gathering over all.—The choir were piled away, except a few, left for use near the altar. I preferred sinking into a confessional near the wall, where no ray of light penetrated. I laid my head upon my knapsack. I heard the priest's voice, the low, heavenly murmur of the organ, and then—I fell asleep.

Did I dream what follows? As I am telling you as simply and truthfully as I can all that I know of the matter, I begin by saying that I have never been able to satisfy myself entirely upon this point. Assuredly, the strangeness is no way lessened, but rather increased twofold, as the sequel will show, if one can believe that the strong and painful impression left upon my brain was produced while I was asleep.

I woke—that is to say my own distinct impression is that I woke—just as the service was finished. In half an hour the cathedral would be silent and deserted; then it would be locked up for the night. If possible, why not pass the night here, instead of seeking and praying for a bed elsewhere? My legs felt mightily disinclined to carry me a yard farther. At dawn, when the doors were opened, I should rise up refreshed to seek for work. But, even while I revolved these things in my mind, I saw a light coming down the aisle where I was—nearer and nearer. I shrunk as far back as possible into the corner of the confessional, hoping to escape detection.—But it was not to be. The sacristan was upon his rounds, to see that there was no loiterers in the sacred building; his vigilant eye spied me.—He laid a hand on my shoulder; he shook me—I must move off. With a heavy sigh I rose, and then, for the first time, perceived two young women standing behind the sacristan their eyes fixed upon me. No doubt they were leaving the cathedral, and had stopped, arrested at the sight of a young man being unearthed from a confessional.

It was impossible to mistake that they were sisters, though one was shorter and much less well-favored than the other; but they had the same gray, piercing eyes, fair skins, and hair which was somewhat beyond flaxen—it was almost white. This hair was worn in a strange fashion, which I cannot describe, though I see it even now before me—the glittering spiral threads hanging partly down the back, and surmounted by some sort of black coil or conical head-gear. Their aspect, altogether, was very singular; I found that, so soon as my eye had fallen on them, I could not take it off; and, to say the truth, if I stared, the young women returned my stare with interest. As I moved wearily away the elder one spoke.