

Choice Literature.

BY A WAY SHE KNEW NOT.

The Story of Allison Bain.

BY MARGARET M. ROBERTSON

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)

Allison sat watching her as she took a key from its hiding-place and opening the big chest in the corner, searched in it for a while. When the old woman raised herself up and turned toward Allison again, there lay on the palm of her hand a gold ring. It was large and massive, and had evidently been rubbed and polished lately, for it shone bright in the light as she held it up to the lamp.

"Look ye at it," said the mistress. "Until this day I have never, for forty years and mair, set e'en upon it. I hae been twice married—though folk here ken naethin about that—and this was my first marriage ring. It was my mother's before me, and her mother's before her. It held a charm, they said, to bring happy days, but it brought none to me—he died within the year. The charm was broken maybe, because I was a wilfu lassie—an undutiful daughter. But it may work again wi' you. Take it, and put it on your finger."

But Allison refused it, and put her hands behind her. "And what for no?" It's my ain to give or to keep as I like. Ye needna be feared," said Mistress Jamieson, with offence.

"But why should ye wish to give it to me?"

"But I hae naeboddy else to gie it to. There's not, to my knowledge, one living that ever belonged to me. I may be dead before ye come back again. And I like ye, Allison Bain. And the ring may keep evil from ye, if ye wear it on your hand."

Allison looked anxiously into the old woman's eager face. What did she mean? Why did she offer to her a marriage ring? Did she know more than others knew about her? Was a new danger coming upon her? She must not anger her, at any rate. So when the old woman took her hand again she did not resist.

"There is the charm written on the inside of it, 'Let love abide till death deyvde.' Ye'll see it by the daylight."

But the ring was far too large for Allison's finger. It slipped from it and fell to the ground.

"Eh! me! is that an ill sign, think ye?" said the mistress.

"It is a sign that your grandmother was a bigger woman than me," said Allison with an uncertain smile. "It is very kind of you, Mistress Jamieson, to think of giving it to me, but—"

"It's a pity. But it's yours. On your hand it would hae keptit awa' evil. Ye must put it on a ribbon and hang it round ye're neck, and it may do the same. It will keep ye in mind yoursel' if it munda naeboddy else."

Allison gazed at her with eyes full of trouble. But in the face so deeply marked with the cares and sorrows and discontents of many years, she saw nothing to awaken distrust or fear. There were tears in the pale, sunken eyes, and the tremulous movement of the lips told only of kindly interest. Whatever she knew or suspected, Allison felt that the old woman did not mean her harm.

"Why should you be so kind to me—a strange?" said she gently.

"I hardly ken myself, except that I wish ye well. And then ye mind me o' my ain youth, partly that ye're sae like what I once was, and partly that ye are sae different. I can see now whose I gaed wrong. And ye hae your life afore ye. Hae patience, and make the best of it that ye may."

"I'll try," said Allison humbly. And so they parted.

Allison got a glimpse of the grim old face among those who were standing about the door to see them set off in the morning. And she never saw it more. Before Allison came back to Nethermuir again, the schoolmistress was done with her toils and troubles, and discontents, and was at rest. And Allison never knew what the old woman might have known or guessed of her life before she came to the manse.

There were a good many others there to see the travellers away. Marjorie was in the "gig" with her father and mother, who were to take her to join Mrs. Esselmont at Firhill, so her time for tears was not come, nor was theirs. The child looked round on the faces of her friends and smiled and nodded, and was sorry and glad at the same time, but she was not, as she had told them, in the least afraid of what might be before her.

The same might be said of her father and mother—with a difference. They were glad, and they were sorry, and the mother was a little faint-hearted for them both at the thought of the long days that lay before them. But they were not afraid. They trusted their child in the Good Hand which had "led them all their life long until now," and they had confidence in Allison Bain.

Allison herself wondered a little at their perfect faith in her. The night before, when worship was over, she had stayed behind the other to hear a few last words which were yet to be spoken. When the father and mother had said all they had to say, and Allison was at the door to go away, she paused a minute or two, then coming back again she said gravely:

"I think if you had known me all my days,—if you had seen all my life till now, I think you would still be willing to trust me with your Marjorie. But I cannot tell you. There is a reason—it is better to say nothing. Some day, I hope, I may be able to tell you all."

"We can wait till then," said the minister heartily. The child's mother said the same.

They had trusted her from the first, and any doubts which might have arisen as to the wisdom of committing their child to the care of one whom they really knew very little, were put aside at the remembrance of all that she had already done for her. The few words which Mrs. Esselmont said to them as to her interview with Allison encouraged them also, and they, too, agreed with her in thinking that it was as well not to seek to know more than Allison was willing to reveal.

Allison was glad, and more than glad, to get away. But still when the travellers reached the last point where a glimpse could be caught of the valley in which the little town lay, she told herself that, thankful as she was to leave it for a while, she was more thankful still that in her time of need she had been guided to find a refuge there.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Unless you can swear for life or for death,
Oh! fear to call it loving."

Business made it necessary for Mrs. Esselmont to remain one day in Aberdeen. She stayed with a friend, but Allison and Marjorie found a place prepared for them in the house where Robin, now a student in the university, had taken up his abode.

It was a dark and rainy day, and Robin was greatly disappointed that he could not take them out to see all that was to be seen in the town, and Marjorie was disappointed also. But in her heart Allison was glad of the rain and the gray mist which came when the rain was over. For how could she be sure of those whom she might meet in the streets, or of those who might see her? Every hour that passed helped to lighten the dull weight on her heart, and gave her courage to look forward with hope.

Dr. Fleming came to see Marjorie in the afternoon, as her father had asked him to do. He looked at Allison with astonished eyes.

"You owe me thanks for sending you out yonder," said he.

"And so do we," said Robin.

"It was a good day for me," said Allison, and her eyes said more than that.

"Yes, better than you know," said the doctor. "And for you, too, my wee pale lily, if all I hear be true. And so Allison Bain is going to carry you away and to bring you home again a bonny, blooming rose, is she? May God grant it," added the doctor reverently.

"I will try to take good care of her," said Allison.

"I am sure of that."

When the visit was over, Allison followed the doctor to the door.

"I would be glad if I were sure that my name would not be named over yonder," said she, casting down her eyes.

"Be glad then, for your name shall not be spoken. Yes, one man has come to inquire about you, and more than once. When I saw his face and heard his voice, I understood how you might well wish to keep out of his sight. Stay in the house while you remain here. There may be others who would speak though I keep silence. God bless you." And then he went away.

"I may be doing the man a wrong, since he says she is his lawfully wedded wife, but I cannot—I have not the heart to betray her into his hands."

In the evening John Beaton came in. Marjorie was already in her bed, but she was not asleep; and they wrapped her in a plaid, and brought her into the parlour again to see her friend. She had the same story to tell. She was glad and she was sorry; but she was not afraid, since Allison was with her.

"I will have her all to myself," said Marjorie.

John stooped to touch with his lips the little hand that lay on his arm.

"Happy little Marjorie," he whispered in her ear.

She soon fell asleep, and was carried away to her bed again. While Allison lingered beside her, John said to his friend:

"Robin, my lad, go up to your books for a while. I must have a word with Allison."

Robin nodded his head, but he did not move till Allison returned. Then he started up in great haste.

"I must see Guthrie for a minute. Don't go till I come back, John," said he. "Can I do anything for you now, Allison?"

"Nothing more," said Allison, and Robin disappeared.

There was nothing said for a while. Allison took up her work. She was taking a few necessary stitches for the student, she said. They spoke about the child, and about those at home who would miss her greatly, and about other things. "Did you see my mother before you came away?" said John.

"Yes, I went to bid her good-bye on the last night."

And then she added that she thought his mother was "wearying" to see him, and that he should go home soon.

"Yes, I have been busy of late, and I have been away. Allison, I have been in the parish of Kilgower."

Allison laid down her work and fixed her eyes on his face, growing very pale.

"It was a business journey. A letter came asking that some one should be sent to make an estimate as to the cost of repairing a farm-house. It was asked that John Beaton might be the man sent, and when I turned the leaf, and saw the name of Brownrig, I guessed the reason why."

Allison asked no question, but sat regarding him with troubled eyes. All the story was not told to her, and John spoke very quietly. But it had been an unpleasant visit to him, and had moved him greatly.

He found Brownrig waiting for him at the inn of the town, but John refused his invitation to go to his house, saying to himself:

"If I have any lies to tell him, they would be none the easier to tell after I had eaten his bread."

Brownrig did not take offence at the refusal, as at first he had seemed inclined to do. He came in the morning, and was quite civil, even friendly, as they went away together to attend to their business. He told John about the country folk, and about the various farms which they passed; and at last came round by Grassie.

"It is a good farm, but has fallen back of late, and will likely soon be in the market. John Bain was a good farmer and a good man, much respected in the country-side. He died lately. His son, William Bain, had gone wrong before that. An idle lad he was, and hastened his father's death."

"I kenned by this time what he was to be at," said John to Allison, when he had gone thus far. "And I thought it wiser to take the matter into my own hands. So I said I thought I had heard the name of William Bain before. Where could it have been?"

"In the tollbooth, likely," said Brownrig, losing hold of himself for a minute, for his eyes gleamed with eagerness or anger. I cannot say which.

"Yes it might. I have been there," I said. 'I had a friend who went there now and then on Sunday afternoons, and once or twice I went with him. But I never saw Bain. He must have been out before ever I went there.'

"I saw the change in the man's face when I said this."

"He was here in June," he said. He's off to America now, and I would give much to ken who went with him. There are few men that one can trust. Truth may be so told as to make one believe a lie; but I'll win to the end o' the clue yet," he said. He had an evil look when he said it.

(To be continued.)

THE SLAVE TRADE IN CENTRAL AFRICA.

Several circumstances have combined of late to call particular attention to the trade in slaves carried on in Equatorial Africa. The venerable Cardinal Lavigerie has been preaching a crusade against it. The questioning eyes of the civilized world have been peering into the recesses of the Dark Continent to catch some reassuring glimpses of Stanley and Emin Pasha. The recent outbreaks in Zanzibar have been more or less closely connected with the accursed trade. And in spite of all that has been said and written and done about the matter, the "open sore of the world," as Livingstone called it, has not been healed. The trade is, indeed, said to threaten the very extinction in oppressed races, for the havoc the traders make is frightful.

So far from the slave trade being on the decline, it is, by the unanimous testimony of unimpeachable witnesses, vastly on the increase. It has, indeed, entirely ceased on the West Coast, by the general agreement of the Powers originally interested in it; and this fact has led many into the error of thinking that the African slave trade, as such, was virtually abolished; but in Central and Eastern Africa it not only exists in full activity, but has attained a development which was never before known in history. In 1875 the annual drain caused by the slave trade was estimated at 1,000,000, it is now put down at 2,000,000 souls. This number of course includes far more than the slaves actually sold; these bear but a small proportion to the numbers who are killed in the slave raids, and who die on the march to the coast.

The tribes principally concerned in the trade are Arabs, or mixed races of Arabs and the original inhabitants of the country. Of these the worst are the Metis, men without conscience or pity, so infamous for their bestial corruption and cruelty that they justify the African proverb, "God made the whites; God made the blacks; the devil alone made the Metis." These Arabs pour into Africa with the deliberate purpose, as Professor Drummond puts it, of making Paradise a hell, and their "encampments for carrying on a wholesale trade in this terrible commodity are now established all over the heart of Africa." Their mode of procedure is generally very much the same. The leader of the gang first musters his desperadoes, consisting of the wildest and most savage natives to be found in the country. These being well armed and provisioned with an ample supply of rice and rum for several days or weeks, will set out on a lengthened tour into the interior. Having fixed upon a peaceful village to be attacked during the night, they skulk in the adjacent woods until the appointed hour, and then, on a signal being given by the captain of the expedition, they pounce upon the place, set fire to the huts, and capture the helpless natives when attempting to escape. Helpless infants, old people unfit for slaves, and those who offer violent resistance are put to death at once; whilst young men and women, and boys and girls, who fall into their hands, are closely pinioned, and with their heads made fast in forked sticks, or tied to the slave chain, are driven to the coast as cattle to the market.

Such is the account given by an old resident in Africa; but frightful as it is, it affords but a faint picture of the horrors and cruelties of a slave raid. Professor Drummond tells us that sometimes these Arab traders will actually settle for a year or two in the heart of some quiet community. They pretend perfect friendship; they molest no one; they barter honestly; they plant the seeds of their favourite vegetables and fruits, and meantime they buy ivory, tusk after tusk, until great piles of it are buried underneath their huts, and all their barter goods are gone. Then one day, suddenly, the inevitable quarrel is picked, and a wholesale massacre follows. Enough only are spared from the slaughter to carry the ivory to the coast; the grass huts of the village are set on fire; the Arabs strike camp, and the slave march, worse than death, begins.

The desolation of these districts, terrible as it is, is not confined to the village where the first raid is perpetrated. Mr. James Stephenson speaks of an Arab horde which had been raiding for eleven months between the Congo and the Lubiranzi, and were then about to perform the same cruel work between the Biyerré and Wane Kirandu. The traders admitted that they had only 2,300 captives, yet they had raided through the length and breadth of a country larger than Ireland, inhabited by about a million people, and 118 villages and 43 districts had been devastated for the scanty profit of 2,300 females and children. To obtain these they must have shot a round number of 2,500 people, while 1,300 men died by the wayside through scarcity of provisions and the intensity of their hopeless wretchedness. Five such expeditions had swept the district, obtaining, it was computed, 5,000 slaves, at the cruel expense of 33,000 lives! Cardinal Lavigerie bears similar testimony. The number of slaves sold annually he declared to be not less than 400,000, and to capture these at least 2,000,000 were massacred.

During the year 1881-82, Lieut. Wissman and Dr. Pogge made a remarkable journey across the heart of Africa to the south of the Congo. They traversed a region but little known, where the natives were of a superior type, skilled in the working of copper and iron and in all industrial arts. Their villages were models of cleanliness; the houses well built and surrounded by gardens and palm trees; some of the settlements were more like cities than villages, containing a population of some hundreds of thousands, and requiring some three or four hours to march from one side to the other. The inhabitants were yet unacquainted with Arab traders. . . . Now this pleasant scene is all changed. From a letter written from East Africa at the commencement of this year by a noted traveller, we learn that the populous