

[Written for the Family Circle.]

How She Kept Faith.

BY MRS. CROSS.

CHAPTER III.

TRIALS AND TROUBLES.

"Faith alone can interpret life, and the heart that aches and bleeds with the stigma of pain, alone bears the likeness of Christ and can comprehend its dark enigma."

I MUST turn from these bright scenes to speak of sorrow and care, for this is the common lot. Mrs. Barr was taken seriously ill. Medical aid was procured, but seemed unable to understand her malady, and she grew steadily worse. Amanda, with confidence in her lover's healing powers, sent off a messenger for him, only to learn that he had been hastily summoned to the bedside of a dying brother in a distant city, leaving a letter to be forwarded to her explaining all. When he reached his brother he saw the end must come in a few days at most, and a week after his arrival he died, leaving to Dr. A. the task of settling his affairs which occupied another week. Therefore he found when he reached Mrs. Barr he could do no good. "She must go to a hospital, where she will have the best advice and care," he said decidedly. "Then I will go to the city with her, try for a situation near her, where I can get to see her as often as possible," said Amanda. This was done, and Amanda found a place as assistant teacher in a private school near her mother. Dr. Atherton accompanied them to the city, and on the last evening they spent together before his return, broke gently to Amanda a new grief to be borne. "My brother William was one of the kindest souls on earth, he was too generous, could not bear to witness sorrow that he could by any possibility relieve. He could never say 'no' to any request for a loan, if a friend was in need, and so he became the prey of designing men. He has left several debts behind him which amount to a considerable sum. I am not legally bound to pay them, but in honor I feel it my duty, I could not bear to think that any one had been a loser by my brother. I have therefore taken it upon myself only asking time, which has been cheerfully given, to make all straight, yet this makes it much harder for us, my darling what do you say?"

She answered with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks, in her enthusiasm, "you have done nobly, do not fear that I shall blame you, it was the only honorable course open to you, and what signifies a few years more or less to us when we are supported by unchanging trust, and unbounded confidence in each other. It could not be soon anyway for my mother is my first duty."

"Well as we will trust it with the higher wisdom, which is too wise to err and too good to be unkind, and this is the last evening we shall soon spend together we will look upon the bright side only," said the doctor hopefully, "but you have removed a weight from my mind." After a few weeks the physicians at the hospital decided nothing more could be done, and at Mrs. Barr's desire they returned home. "She may live many years, but will probably never be any better," was the hopeless decision. "Will these gatherings and eruptions be continual?" asked Amanda, with a calmness that astonished herself. "It is most likely, my poor child," said the elderly doctor, with a heart full of pity for them both, then started up hastily to prevent her from falling, as he feared from her sudden deathly pallor, that she would faint. But she did not, her heart went up in a cry for help that is never withheld from those who seek, and strength was given her to go on with her duties. So began home life once again.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH SUFFERING.

"Oh woman, in thine hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light, quivering aspen made,
When pain and sickness wring the brow,
A ministering angel, thou."

So life went on; one day is like another, an incessant, almost unvarying course. Is there anything harder for youth to bear? And dimly at first, but more and more clearly, she felt that the engagement must be broken. It was wronging her lover to hold him to it now. His prospects must not be sacrificed. She felt that the act must be hers; he was too generous to ask a release. "He would remain true to me, I am sure," she thought, with a thrill of happiness—"would allow his whole life to be clouded for my sake, to help me bear my burden; and to what purpose? No, no! it must not be." Still she could not bring herself at once to take the decisive step; his companionship was so dear, his letters almost the only alleviation of her lot—so tender, so hopeful, so restful, how could she give him up? Sitting long, night after night, by the dying embers, or lying awake pondering until exhausted nature sank to rest, toiling at her household tasks, the same thought was ever with her—"It must come to that. I could not leave my mother in her extreme need of me. I could not ask him to assume such a burden, and I can never tell him my reasons; he will deem me cold and changed—a heartless flirt, perhaps—and I must bear it. How can I bear it?" At times her whole nature rose up in passionate rebellion, she would go away to her own room and throw herself upon her knees by the bedside, and burying her face in her hands, pour out her pent-up emotions in a flood of tears. Then, having thus relieved her overcharged heart, she would go on for a time with a mercifully-given calmness that was almost peace, learning daily to cast her care on the infinite strength and love, though the lesson was hard to learn and must be repeated over and over again before it could be known perfectly.

When this was nearly accomplished, she wrote:

"Please, Dr. Atherton; let our engagement be at an end. Do not ask my reasons for this request, please; I ask it as a last favor; and do not judge me harshly; you can never know my motives. I believe you will feel this blow and I am sincerely sorry for you. I can not grant you an interview. You need not send back my letters; I am not afraid to trust them in your hands. Farewell, and God bless you. Do not come.—AMANDA."

To this the following was his answer.

"My first impulse upon reading your letter was to come to you at once; nothing but your express command could have restrained me. You can not know what a cruel blow your words have given. How can I let there be an end of all between us without even a word of explanation? What have I done? What can this mean? I can only think one of two things, if you refuse to explain: either you love another, or it is on account of those unpaid debts I told you of. I would have sworn either supposition was false a week ago, but now I know not what to think. One thing is certain, if you give me up I can not remain here. I will wait a week for an answer from you, and if I receive none, I will try the far West. I dare not allow this disappointment, bitter and cruel as it is, to wreck my life. I have a work to do and I must do it with my might; there is a purpose in each of our lives and I must accomplish mine; I shall need to work doubly hard now to forget self in helping others; must work to kill thought and memory. But oh, my darling! I hope for the best; my heart cries out for you; surely you will write me if only to say one word—"come." If not, I shall ever be your friend and well-wisher.—JAMES ATHERTON."

Amanda had gone to her own room to read this alone, and when she had read it she felt as if her heart were breaking. Even the luxury of tears was denied her, and she could only moan out her anguish.

"My heart cries out for you!" He had written, and did she not know by hourly experience what that meant. She pitted him even more than herself, for she could have the comfort of knowing that he whom she loved was worthy, while he must believe her either false-hearted or mercenary, perhaps deem her a heartless coquette, and she could not remove the misapprehension. There was one anxious thought set forever at rest by his letter. "Less things have spoiled men's lives before now, what if he should take to drink to drown care," had often been in her mind, but now she doubted him no more. He was no share of circumstance, he was master of himself and his fate. When she had grown