

Choice Literature.

BY A WAY SHE KNEW NOT.

The Story of Allison Bain.

BY MARGARET M. ROBERTSON

CHAPTER XXIII. (Continued.)

Jacob Strong! John told his mother long afterward, that the Bible had been searched from end to end to find a good name for a good man, none better than that could have been found for their new friend. Not that either of the patriarch's names fitted him exactly. He was not a "supplanter," and though he was on the right side, as no one who knew him well would deny or even doubt, yet if one had wished to tell his character in two words, it would not have been as "a soldier of God" that one would have described him. But he was in many ways very like the patriarch, as we see him in the Bible story. He was wise, he was wily, he was patient. He could bide his time, and secure his chance, and when it came to that, that he had to yield, or to humble himself, to meet loss, or to dispense beyond what was pleasing to a man who took reasonable satisfaction in getting and in holding, he could yet do it without wincing visibly. He was fortunate in being in the hands of two good women, his mother and his wife, who knew him well, and loved him well, and who were jealous for his honour before men, and for his singleness of heart before God.

Of course John's knowledge of his character came later, and by slow degrees. But even on this first night he was greatly interested in his talk, which was at once "worldly wise and heavenly simple," as he afterward heard one of his neighbours say. And Jacob was strong in nature as in name. He could "hold on." He had paid every dollar which his farm had originally cost him, by the work of his own hands on other men's farms. And with the help of his mother first, and then of his wife, "who each carried a good head on her shoulders," as he told John, he had made it pay. By and by he added another hundred acres to the first hundred, and later, when "the Western fever" set in, and people began to talk about prairie lands, and great wheat farms to be made out there in the far West, one of his neighbours sold out to him, and Jacob's two hundred acres became four.

"And that is about as much as I want to have on my hands, till labour comes to cost less, which won't be for a spell, as things look now," said he.

All this he told to John while a second heavy shower kept him waiting. Before the rain was over, Willie Bain was at rest for the night, in Mrs. Strong's south chamber. Then John told all that was necessary for them to know about the lad,—how, though he had known friends of his at home, he had never seen the lad himself until he had met him by chance on the lake shore. Finding him alone and ill, he had taken him home and cared for him. Bain was better now, and would soon be well. Yes, he meant to stay in the country. As to himself, John could not say whether he would stay long or not, the chances were he would remain for a time.

Then when the rain seemed over, John rose to go. The folk where they lived might be troubled about them. He had something to do in the morning, but in the course of the day he would come back for his friend. And with many thanks for their kindness to the lad, he took his departure.

Since William Bain had acknowledged his name, John thought it right that Mr. Hadden should be informed of his arrival in the town, and next morning he went again to see him, at his place of business. He was a good deal surprised at the manner in which Mr. Hadden received him. It was not at all as one receives a stranger, he thought, but the reason was soon made clear to him.

John Beaton was not altogether a stranger to Mr. Hadden. His name had been mentioned in both letters which Allison had written, as one who had been willing to befriend her brother while he was in prison, and who wished to still befriend him since he was set free. John told of his meeting with the lad, of his illness and his good fortune in falling into the hands of the kind people out at the farm.

"It must be the Strongs you are speaking of. Certainly he could be in no better hands, if he still needs to be taken care of. And the longer he is there, the better it will be for him."

"I would like well to leave him there for a while, if they were willing to keep him. I will see how things look when I go out for him to-night."

Of his own affairs or intentions John said nothing. He spent the rest of the morning in looking about him, in order to ascertain what sort of work there was to be done in the town, to which he might put his hand with a hope of success. There was building going on, and he came at last to a wide yard, where stone-cutting was done, and he said to himself, that if they would but give him a chance, he would fall to, and do his best for a while at least.

But he did not go to inquire at once. He stood thinking of the day when he first tried his hand on the granite of Aberdeen, and earned his shilling before he laid the hammer down again.

"I might have done better, but then I might have done worse," he admitted with not unreasonable satisfaction. "And if I take it up again, it need not be 'for a continuance,' as auld Crombie would say. I must see the lad fairly set to honest work, and then I may go my way."

He offered himself at the place, and was taken on at once. His wages were to be decided upon when his first day's work should be done, and it need not be said that his wages were of the best.

When he went to the Strong farm that night, he found that Mr. Hadden had been there before him. Willie Bain's first word to him was.

"Why did you never tell me that ye had seen our Allie?"

"Do ye no' mind that, till last night you never told me your name? How was I to ken?" added John, as Willie hung his head. "I did ken you as soon as ever I saw your face. Yes, I have seen your sister. She is safe where she is. No evil hand can touch her, and in a while she is coming out here to you."

Poor Willie was but weak yet, and the tears were running down his cheeks, while John told him in few words what his sister had been doing, how she had won the respect of all who had known her, and how she had now gone away from Scotland with a good friend, but was looking forward to the time when

she might join her brother, so that they might have again a home together.

"And, Willie, my lad," added John, gravely, "if I had a sister like yours, I would make a man of myself for her sake."

"You are a man already," said Willie, with a sound which might have been either a laugh or a sob. "As for me—yes, I ken I have been taking right care of myself for a while. I fell into ill hands down yonder. But now I have you, and I will be a man for Allie's sake."

They had been tokens visible of the fact that the young man had not been "taking care of himself," but John had spoken no word which betrayed his knowledge.

They were in the garden at this time, sitting in a wide, green walk, between high rows of currant bushes, a great apple tree making a grateful shade around them. By-and-by they rose and walked up and down, John lending his strength to help his friend's weakness; and he asked.

"Would you not like to stay here a little while?"

"Till I get my strength back again? Yes, I would like it well. I mean sometime to have land of my own, and could begin to learn here the new ways that are needed in a new country. Yes, I would like well to bide here for a while."

He spoke eagerly and hopefully.

"I wish Allie were here. There would be no fear then, said Willie, looking up at John with Allie's wistful eyes.

"She cannot come for a time. It is likely that she might be sought for here—in Mr. Hadden's neighbourhood, I mean. But, Willie man, I think it is as well that she should not come just now, even for your sake. It is you who would be looking up to her, because she is wiser than you, and maybe stronger. She would lead, and you would follow. That might be well in a way. But it would be better, it would be far more manly for you to learn to stand by your own strength—to walk by your own wisdom. Of course, I mean by the help of God, in all things," said John, gravely.

"Do ye ken Allie well?" asked Willie, looking up into his friend's face.

John hesitated a moment.

"I cannot say that I have known her long, or seen her often. But I know that she has borne much trouble well and bravely, and that she must be strong. And I know that she has walked warily and done wisely in difficult places, so that all those who do know her well, respect her, and some few people love her dearly—my mother among the rest."

"You must tell me all about her some time," said Willie, with glistening eyes.

"Yes," said John. Then he paused before he added:

"I think, Willie, in speaking of your sister to any one here, you should say nothing about her marriage, since it has not been a happy one."

Willie withdrew his hand from John's arm, and turned upon him with a face white with anger.

"Married! Happy! I'll swear that he has never touched her hand, nor looked in her face since that cursed day. Call you that marriage?"

"Thank God!" said John; "and may he never touch her hand, nor look upon her face. Gently, my friend, she is safe from him now."

Then he led him back to the shadow of the apple tree, and told him more about his sister. He told how she had lived at the manse, and how they had valued her there. He told of little Marjorie, whom her father and mother had entrusted to Allison's care, and of the child's love for her and how Allison had been helped and comforted through her love for the child. She was quite safe now, so far away in the South, and no one would harm her while she was in Mrs. Esselmont's care. John talked on till the lad had grown quiet again, and then they were called to tea.

The first words that Grandma Strong said when they came in together were:

"You don't think of taking that boy back to that hot place to-night, do you? I don't think you had better—for a day or two, least."

It was all very easily settled after that. John was glad to agree with the dear old woman. Willie was to stay at the farm till he was a little stronger.

"We're glad to have him stay. Don't you say a word about it," was the younger Mrs. Strong's answer, when John tried to thank her for all their kindness to his friend, for whom he felt responsible, he said, until he should be strong and well.

"You had better stay and help us through with haying and harvesting. You could pay your way and his too, and have something over," said Mr. Strong.

But John had his own work laid out before him, and intended to make long hours, so that he could hardly hope to come out to see his friend for a while.

"Come Saturday night and spend Sunday. You can go to meeting here as well as there."

And John answered:

"Yes, I will be glad to come."

Does this sudden friendship, this acceptance of utter strangers, without a word spoken in their behalf, except what they spoke for themselves, seem strange, unlikely, impossible? It did not seem strange to John, till he came to think of it afterward as he walked home. Face to face with these kind people, their mutual interest seemed natural enough. In thinking about it, as he went swiftly on in the moonlight, he did not wonder a little. And yet why should he wonder? he asked himself.

"Honest folk ken one another, with few words about it. It has happened well, and—not by chance," added he, reverently, recalling many a one at home who would have him often in their thoughts at the best place and thinking especially of two, who in all quiet moments, would be "remembering" both him and his friend there.

It must not be forgotten that all this happened many years ago, before all the nations of the earth had turned their faces toward the West, in search of a refuge from poverty and tyranny, disgrace or despair. There was room enough, and land enough for all who were willing to work and to live honestly. Every strong and honest man who came, while he bettered himself and those who belonged to him, did good also to his neighbours, and to the county at large. And so in those days, as a rule, new-comers were well received. But beyond this, John and his friend were liked for their own sakes, and might well rejoice at the welcome which they got at the farm-house, for a great many good things and happy days came to them through the friends they found there, before all was done.

It is possible that if John had not met in with William Bain in those circumstances, he might have travelled about

for a while till he was strong again, and then he might have turned his face homeward. If he had found the lad well, and doing well, he might have contented himself with leaving him to the kindly care, or to the unobtrusive supervision of Mr. Hadden, who had known his family, and who had promised to befriend him. But John could not quite free himself from a sense of responsibility with regard to Willie Bain. He must keep sight of him for a while. He liked the lad from the first, and soon he loved him. He would not be losing time by remaining a few weeks. He meant to travel by-and-by, and see the country, and in the meantime he might do something toward helping Willie to make a man of himself for Allison's sake.

So he went to the stone-yard, and did his day's work with the rest. It was hard work for a while. He had got out of the way of it somewhat, and he had not got back his strength altogether. The day was long, and he was glad when night came. After the first week, however, he was himself again, and then he grew strong and brown, and was as fit for his work as ever he had been, he told his mother in the second letter which he sent her, after he began.

He told her about William Bain. But that was for herself alone. As no one else in Nethermuir had ever heard of the lad, it was not necessary to speak of him there, lest his name might be mentioned in the hearing of some who might not wish him or his sister well. He did not write to Allison about her brother. Mr. Hadden did that, and the story of John's kindness to the lad lost nothing in being told by him.

Before the summer was over, John had begun to consider the question, whether, after all, it might not be as well for him to stay where he was, and take up a new life in a new land. His mother had more than once in her letters assured him of her willingness to come out to him should he decide to remain in America. But there was to be no haste about it. He must be quite certain of himself and his wishes, and he must have won such a measure of success, as to prove that he was not making a mistake, before she joined him. It might be better for him to be alone for a while, that he might be free to come and go, and do the very best for himself. The best for himself, would be the best for his mother. And in the meantime she was well and strong, in the midst of kind friends, and content to wait. And she would be more than content to join him when the right time came.

And so John followed his mother's counsel. He kept his eyes open and "worked away," and by the end of the first year, he began to see his way clear to "the measure of success" which his mother desired for him. He had proved himself, as a workman, worthy of the confidence of those who had employed him, and as a man, he had won the esteem of many a one besides. That he worked with his hands, did not in that country, at that time, necessarily exclude him from such society as the town of Barstow offered. But it made him shy of responding to the advances of some of the people who lived in the big white houses among the trees along the street, and who went to the same church in which, after a few weeks of wandering, here and there, John settled down.

The only people whom he came to know very well during his first year, were the Strongs at the farm, and the Haddens. Mr. Hadden was friendly with him from the first, because he was a fellow-countryman, and because he was a friend of William Bain's. Afterward, they were more than friendly, for better reasons. Mr. Hadden had no cause to feel surprise in finding in a skilled workman from his native land a man of wide reading and intelligence. He had found many such among his countrymen who had come to seek a home in his own adopted country. But John Beaton was different from most of those with whom he had come in contact, in that it was not necessary in his case, that allowance should be made for unconscious roughness of manner or speech, or for ignorance of certain ways and usages of society, which are trifling in themselves, but of which it is desirable that one should be aware.

But at this time John did not care much for society of any kind. He never had cared much for it. In Nethermuir he had "kept himself to himself," as far as most of the townfolk were concerned, and it must be owned, that beyond his own small circle of friends in the manse, and in one or two other houses, he had not been a very popular person. He had no time to give to anything of that sort, he had always said, but he might have found the time, if he had had the inclination. He had not much leisure in Barstow. Still, in the course of the first two years, he came to know a good many people in the way of business; and in connection with the work undertaken by the church to which he belonged, he also made friends whom he valued, but his first friends were his best friends.

All that need be told of the first three years of his residence in Barstow, may be gathered from a letter which he wrote to his mother about that time.

"You ought to be a happy woman, mother, for you have gotten the desire of your heart. Do you not mind once saying to me, that you desired for me nothing better in this life, than that I should do as my father had done, and make my own way in the world? Well, that is just what I am doing. There is this difference between us—that I have got 'a measure of success' on easier terms than my father did. I am not a rich man, and I have no desire to be one—though even that may come in time. But I stand clear of debt, and I see a fair way to success before me. I have 'got on' well, even for this country, where all things move more rapidly than with us at home.

"I have had two friends who stood by me all these years. They have helped me with their money, with their names, and with their influence. I might, in the course of time, have gotten on without their help, but they have taken pleasure in standing by me, like true friends.

"Yes, I have liked my work, and my way of life, though to you I will own that I have sometimes wearied of them—and of everything else. But one's life must go on till God's will brings it to an end, and I know of no other way that would suit me better now. And between whites, as I have told you before, I find higher work which I am able to help along.

"And now, dear mother—when are you coming home?—For this is to be your home, is it not? You say you are able to come alone. But if you can wait a few months longer I will go for you. I have building going on in different parts of the city, and the foundation of your own house is laid, on the knove (knoll), which I have told you of, beneath the maple trees, and full in sight of the great lake into which the sun sinks every night of the year. In six months it will be ready for you, and I shall be ready to cross the sea to bring you home.

"I long with all my heart to have my mother here. I think I shall be quite content when that time comes.