

I want, she had said to herself, to so imbue them with the principles of true nobility and piety, that when they join their mother in the better country she will say I have kept the charge committed to me well. And now her engagement with her brother-in-law was soon to terminate, and what would become of the children's training? And a silent prayer went up to Heaven that God would order the unknown events of the future in his wisdom for the best;—the future, with its impenetrable shadows, alternated with undefined gleams of light, terminating in brilliant sunset tints, and outlined by the measureless radiance of a glorious immortality. Then she thought again of the evening service; the words of peace by justification and hope through the resurrection; the grand swelling and receding of the anthem tones, while the skilful changes on the organ seemed to introduce new voices, faint at first, as if the angel choirs caught up the melody and drawing nearer and nearer blended their sweet voices in the joyous song.

All this time Robert sat watching her, and gressing the subject of her reverie, at length reluctantly interrupted the current of her thoughts.

"Anna," said he, "do you recollect one year ago to-day? Lena was with us then; she had the inspiration of the song we heard to-night; she has joined the choir above. You know the hymn which says:

"They sing the Lamb in hymns above,  
And we in hymns below."

"Do you think she was in her right mind then?"

"Do I think she was in her right mind? Certainly," she replied, a little startled by the question. "Why do you ask; do you not think so?"

"Yes, I think she was; but this is why I ask: on the evening of that day, when you were not in the room, she called me to her side and said: "Robert, you have been a faithful and true husband to me, and ours has been a happy wedded life; now I am about to leave you, but I leave you not as I found you. Here are our children; they are dearer to me than my own life; you have them to train and provide for; you can hardly do it alone. I shall be happy, unspeakably happy in my home above; I want you to be happy after I am gone. And now, Robert, I know you always had a strong regard for my sister Anna; she loves the children and she will learn to love you. If you marry again, as I hope you will, I want you to marry Anna."

Here he faltered for a few moments, unable to proceed, while Anna blushed deeply and remained silent. At length Robert proceeded: "I said to her, "Lena darling, it would be unseemly for me to talk of such matters now, leave the future in the hands of God." "So I will," she said, "but why not talk of them now? Who should feel as solicitous for your future welfare and the welfare of the children as I, and who so personally disinterested as myself; just on the threshold of heaven? No one will make you a better, truer wife than Anna, and I am sure you can make her life happy, as you have done mine. And now, Anna, I need only say that my attachment for you has ever been of the deepest and tenderest character consistent with my position and relationships. May I hope to win your love and some day call you my wife?"

During this speech Anna sat suffused with blushes and deeply agitated, only once raising her eyes for a moment to his face.

"Robert," she replied, "I am quite overwhelmed with your declaration and know not what to answer. There are many questions involved which it will be necessary to consider before replying."

"May I not help you in the consideration of them," said Robert, "possibly I may have already given those very questions some attention."

"You know, Robert, marriage with a deceased wife's sister is contrary to law."

"But suppose the law is at best a dead letter, and contrary to Divine law?"

"That is the chief question, but I had always been led to believe that the law itself was founded on the Divine law."

"It might surprise you then to know that the very passage pointed to in defence of the law is an agreement against it, is the 13th verse of chapter xviii. of Leviticus

where if it prohibits marriage with a wife's sister at all, it says, 'during her lifetime,' implying that it may take place after her death.

"Then again there is the parallel relationship of a deceased husband's brother. It was distinctly enjoined in certain cases that a woman be married to a deceased husband's brother, Deut. xxv. 5, and when the fact was stated by the Sadducees, in their objecting to the doctrine of the resurrection, Christ did not question the existence of the law, nor condemn its provisions, and inasmuch as such marriages have at least the implied sanction of the highest authority, there need be no conscientious scruples against them on moral grounds."

"And are you quite, sure," Anna replied, "that there is no other passage in the Bible more directly opposed to such marriages than the one you have quoted? If so I believe a great many persons take it for granted, as I myself did, without investigation, that the Bible condemns such marriages, just because the law of the land pronounces against it. I do wonder how such a law came to be enacted."

"I am satisfied," said Robert, "that there is no passage in the Bible prohibiting marriage with a deceased wife's sister, after his wife's death, and, as you say, no doubt very many persons accept the prohibition view, simply because the law, which is supposed to be formed on the precepts of the Divine law is prohibitory. How the law came to be enacted at first I have not become informed, but I presume it was through a misinterpretation of the meaning of the passage in Deut. xviii. to which I referred, or possibly through jumping at the conclusion that the marital restrictions of the Divine law regarding degrees of consanguinity apply equally to degrees of affinity."

"I am satisfied, Robert, from what you have said, that in marriage with a deceased wife's sister, or with a deceased husband's brother there is no moral delinquency, but the fact remains that the law is against it, declaring it invalid, raising doubts regarding the entailment of property, and giving rise to questions of caste, which, if possible, it were better to avoid."

"What you say, Anna, is true, and yet in Canada and I think in Great Britain too, the great majority are opposed to the law, which is only continued on the statute books in deference to the prejudices of those who, like the Pharisees of old, hold to the tradition of the elders. And, in fact, the law as it stands is inoperative, marriages with a sister-in-law do frequently take place, and I am not aware that the unpleasant results you would naturally expect actually follow, and, indeed, while the law forbids, the church allows; for in the Roman Catholic church, dispensations permitting such marriages are frequently given, showing that it is considered rather as a question of expediency than one involving moral principles, and from all I can learn, public sentiment in all countries vastly preponderates in favor of entire freedom in regard to all marriages except those prohibited in the moral code. There are questions of expediency which have arisen, some contending that such marriages give occasion for scandal to arise; but in my opinion the prohibition of such alliances is a more fruitful source of scandal, and this view you appear to have anticipated when you stipulated that your position as my housekeeper should not be protracted beyond a year."

"True," said Anna, "though I went through no process of reasoning in the matter, I perhaps instinctively felt that lest scandal should arise I ought to make my stay with you as brief as possible; and now, I must confess, as the time approaches for severing my present connexions, I have felt no little trouble of mind as to the future care and training of the children, and, Robert, I must confess society has been very pleasant to me, but I have not dared to think of anything other than a sisterly regard; and now that you have brought the question up in a different light, I feel that it would hardly be reasonable for you to ask me to decide, nor prudent for me to do so without due deliberation. Give me a few days to consider the matter and you shall have an answer."

A week passed pleasantly and quickly away, for though the subject of greatest interest to Robert and doubtless to Anna too was not mentioned, the desire to please each other manifested itself in a thousand little courtesies and acts of kindness, which, though not so very unusual, seemed to be performed