

Choice Literature.

BY A WAY SHE KNEW NOT.

The Story of Allison Bain.

BY MARGARET M. ROBERTSON.

CHAPTER XXV. (Continued.)

Mr. Hume did not answer her at once. He opened again the letter which he held and read it from beginning to end. It was a letter from Dr. Fleming, of Aberdeen, telling him of the state in which Brownrig was lying, and of his relations with Allison. He left it to Mr. Hume to decide whether or not Allison should be told of Brownrig's condition, and to advise her what she ought to do. He said that Mr. Rainy, who had long been a friend of the Bain family, strongly advised that she should come at once to Aberdeen, and added, at Mr. Rainy's request, that as Mr. Brownrig had kept up no close intercourse with any one belonging to him, it might be much for Allison's interest to respond in a friendly spirit to this call. Dr. Fleming, for himself, said that it might be for Allison's future peace of mind, if she could tell this man that she had forgiven his sin against her. The disclosure of Crombie rendered it unnecessary to discuss this letter with her.

"Allison," said Mr. Hume, after some time of silence, "no one can decide this matter for you. You need not fear him any more, and it is well that he should know that you have forgiven him. And it would be well also for you."

"Have I forgiven him? I do not know. I wish him no ill. I never wished him any ill, even at the worst, and if he is dying—"

Allison paused, and a look of something like terror passed over her face, but she did not utter her thought.

"Allison," said Mrs. Hume, "I think there is much in what Crombie said. If you are able truly to forgive his sin against you, it might help him to believe—it might open his eyes to see that the Lord also is willing to forgive and receive him."

"You must trust in God, and do not try to look beyond the doing of present duty. The way is dark before you. But one who loves you sees it all, and he will lead you to the end, whatever it may be. I cannot see the end, but, Allison, I dare not bid you not to go," said Mr. Hume, solemnly.

Allison looked from one to the other, and over her face for a moment came the lost look—the look helpless and hopeless, which they had wondered at and grieved over, in the first days of her coming among them. But it passed away, and she rose, saying:

"Then the sooner I go the better, and I need my time."

"And, Allison, remember, whatever happens we are not to lose sight of one another. There is no need for many words between us. This is your home. Come back again as soon as you are able."

Mr. Hume said the same as he shook her hand. Mrs. Hume went with her to the room where little Marjorie was sweetly sleeping. The two women had something to say to each other. They spoke very quietly, and when she said good-night, the minister's wife kissed and blessed her with a full heart.

Strangely enough, Allison fell asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow. The dawn found her up, and ready for the long walk to the point where she was to take the mail coach to Aberdeen. It cannot be said that she had no misgivings, no faintness of heart, as she turned on the hill-top, and looked back on the house which had been first her refuge, and then her home for so long. For even when she was far away from Nethermuir, and from Scotland, it was to the manse her thoughts turned as home.

"Shall I ever see it again?" she asked herself, sadly. "And how will it be with me then?"

But her courage did not fail her. She remembered distinctly, or rather, she saw clearly the forlorn creature, who on that drear November day, nearly three years ago, stood looking down on the little town.

"Poor soul!" said she pitifully, as if it had been some one else who stood helpless and fearful there. "Ay! poor soul! But was she not well welcomed, and mercifully dealt with there, till she came to herself again? And has not goodness and mercy followed her all her days since then? Why should I be so sore afraid?"

And so on the strength of that she went peacefully, till she came to the place where she was to take the coach, for which she had to wait a while. When she was seated in it she was sorry that she had not sent on her bundle with it, and walked the rest of the way. When she was seated in it she was sorry that she had not sent on her bundle with it, and walked the rest of the way. For the ceaseless droning talk of two old men, who sat beside her, wearied her, and the oaths and bluster of two younger men, who came in later, made her angry and afraid. And altogether she was very tired, and not so courageous as she had been in the morning, when she was set down at the door of the house where Robert lived when his classes were going on. It was better to go there where she was known, than to seek to hide herself among strangers. And why should she hide herself? She had nothing to fear now.

Ah! had she nothing to fear? What might be waiting her in the future? A life which she might loathe perhaps—

"But I must not look beyond this night, or how can I go on? I am trying to do God's will. I am not seeking my own. And surely, His will is best."

But she did not say it joyfully, or even hopefully now, and she had a bad half-hour before the darkness fell, and she could go out unseen. She had another while she waited to see Dr. Fleming, and if his coming had been delayed much longer, her courage might have failed her altogether.

He came at last. He had been expecting her, he said, which surprised her, for Mr. Hume had said nothing of Dr. Fleming's letter to him. He had, however, sent a note by her to the doctor.

"Well?" said she, when he had read it. "Does he tell you what I am to do? I must have come to you even if he had not sent me. I must tell you—only you may not have time. But if you understood all, I think you would wish to help me,—and—my courage is like to fail."

"Mistress Allison, you need tell me nothing that it will trouble you to tell. I ken enough of your story to make me wish to help you to do what you believe to be right. And what I can do, I will do with all my heart."

Allison's answer was a sudden burst of weeping such as no one had ever seen from her before. While it lasted, the doctor turned away and occupied himself at his desk.

"I hope you will excuse me, sir," said Allison in a little; "I am tired, for one thing, and—you are so kind. And I am not sure—though I thought I was sure—that I am doing right in coming here—"

"I think I know what you would say. And—I think you are right in what you desire to do. Mistress Allison, it is a blessed thing to be able to forgive. And the greater the sin against us, the greater the blessedness. And to attain to this, our sacrifice must be entire. Nothing can be kept back."

"But I cannot but keep something back. I dare not look beyond—I think I desire to do God's will but—"

"Ah! do not say 'but.' Be patient, if you cannot be joyful. You will be brought through. And then—you may help to save a sinful soul. Can you seek to look beyond that?" Allison shook her head.

"If I were wise and good. But it is only a little since—since I came to trust Him, and whiles I doubt whether I do trust Him right, so fearful and faint-hearted am I. I have aye been willing to forgive if I could be safe from him. Oh! yes. It was my fault too. I should have trusted God and stood firm," said Allison, as she had said so many times before. "And besides, it was his own life that he ruined, as well as mine. Nay, he did not ruin mine. I have had much to make me content with my life since then. If there had only been the child Marjorie, who loves me dearly, and whom I love. And my brother is doing well. Oh! no, my life has not been spoiled. And the best of all I cannot speak of. Forgiveness! Yes, it is easy to forgive—if that were all."

"Well, having got thus far, be content for the present. And now, Mistress Allison, let me take the guiding of your works and ways, for a time. I am older than you, and in some things, wiser. You shall be drawn into no net, and you shall make no vain sacrifice at the bidding of any one, if I can prevent it. I believe you are striving to do right. Now, go away to Mrs. Robb's, and try to sleep well, and wait till you hear from me. It may be in the morning, but it may be for several days. Have you any woman's work to keep you busy till then?"

"I can find some, I daresay. I give you many thanks for your kind words. My heart is lighter since I have seen your face. Yes, I will be patient and wait."

"That is the right way. Be sure and keep yourself busy about some kind of work till you hear from me again."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"What we win and hold, is through some strife."

Allison waited patiently through one day, and a little anxiously through the second. On the third day there came a note from Doctor Fleming, formal and brief, offering her the place of nurse in the infirmary, which she had held for a short time three years before. Allison was a little startled as she read it, but she did not hesitate a moment in deciding to accept it, and in the evening she went to see him, as he had requested her to do.

"Yes," said the doctor as she entered, "I was sure you would come; you are wise to come. It will be better for you to have something to take up your time and your thoughts for a while at least, and you will be at hand. You must keep strong and well, and you must take up your abode with Mistress Robb. And, my dear," added the doctor gravely, "I would advise you when you come to wear a mutch, and if it is big and plain it will answer the purpose none the worse for that. You'll be better pleased with a little notice as may be for the present."

Allison smiled and assented. She came to the place the next day in her straight black gown and holland apron, a cap of thick muslin covering all her pretty hair.

And then a new life began for her. The former time of her stay there came back very vividly, but the memory of it did not make her unhappy. On the contrary, she was glad and thankful that strength and courage had come to her since then.

"I will trust and not be afraid," she said to herself as she came in at the door, and she said it many times as she went from one bed to another. Before the day was over, she had for the time forgotten her own care, in caring for the poor suffering creatures about her.

There were no "bad cases" in the room in which she had been placed. There were some whose chief complaint was the aches and pains of age, brought on before their time by hard labour and exposure; poor folk who were taking a rest after a season of sharper suffering, and making ready for another turn or two of hard work before the end should come.

"It is no' that I'm sae ill. I hae done mony a day's work with more suffering on me than I have now. But oh! I'm weary, weary, I hae lost heart, and it's time I was awa'," said one old woman who held Allison's hand, and gazed at her with wistful eyes.

"What brings the like o' you here?" said another, "to such a place as this. Ay, ay, ye look pitifu' and ye can lift a head and shake up a pillow without gieing a body's neck a thrav. But I doubt it's just that ye're new to it yet. Ye'll soon grow hardened to it like the lave (the rest)."

"Whisht, woman," said her neighbour, "be thankful for sma' mercies. Ye would be but ill off at hame."

"And be ye thankfu' that ye are an auld wife and near done wi't," said the neighbour on the other side. "As for myself, I'm howed with rheumatics, and me no' fifty yet. I may live many years, says the doctor, and what's to 'come' o' me, the Lord alone kens."

"But," said Allison, speaking very softly, "He does ken. Dinna you mind, 'Even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you.'"

"Ay, but ye see, I'm no' sae sure that He's with me now, or that He has ever been with me. That mak's an awfu' differ."

"But He is willing to come,—waiting to be asked."

"It may be; I dinna ken," said the woman gravely.

They looked at Allison with a little surprise. She was surprised herself. She had no thought of speaking until the words were uttered. She had no thought of speaking until the words were uttered. She was only conscious of being very sorry for them, and of longing to help them. But she had spoken many a word of comfort among them before her work there was done.

A little child with a face like a snowdrop came and looked up at her, touching her hand. Allison took her up in her arms, and carried her with her as she went on.

"Dinna be troublesome, Nannie," said a voice from a distant bed.

"Come and see my mother," said the child.

Her mother was a woman who had been badly burned by her clothes taking fire, while she was in a drunken sleep. She was recovering now, and her little girl was allowed to come and see her now and then.

"Ye can do naething for me," she said as Allison set down the child beside her.

"No, I fear not, except that I might ease you a little, by shaking up your pillow and putting the blankets straight. Are ye in pain?"

"Ill enough. But it's no' the pain that troubles me. It's the fear that I mayna get the use o' my hand again."

"Oh! I hope it mayna be so bad as that," said Allison, shaking up the pillows and smoothing the woman's rough hair, and tying her crumpled cap strings under chin. "What does the doctor say about it?"

(To be continued.)

THREE TENSES.

I.

"I will trust." So we say when we doubt, with uncertain feet groping
In dark, slippery paths, dimly shown by faint stars overhead;
When our heart's anchor drags in the sand, and we blend fear and hoping
In a passionate prayer for the frail bark by tempest be-sted
When a friend's face averted strikes cold to the core of our loving,
When we lay lance in rest 'gainst, perchance, an invincible foe,
What is ours but to say, "I will trust," by the promise disproving
Our force to fulfil, and forecasting a future we never can know?

II.

"I trusted." The words are a threnody, ceaseless, undying;
The requiem of hopes and of holiness earth could not hold.
They speak of defeat in the lists, of the wail underlying
The psalm, the vow that is broken, the tale that is told.
When the cup has been spilled at the lips, when the coveted blessing
Has slipped from the grasp, when the prayer rises feebly and slow,
Looking back on the shame and the loss, all the failure confessing,
"I trusted," we falter, recording a past that all mortals must know.

III.

But "I trust!" When we breathe it, and lean with the strength of our being
On the truth of the solemn-lit stars; plant our foot on the rock—
When we close lip on lip in a blindness of faith worth all seeing,
And with comrade strike palm in a clasp that no doubt can unlock—
What needs more? We have climbed to the summit, have tasted the glory
Given once, and but once in the power of fate to bestow:
Break the cup that hath held the rich draught—shut the book, while the story
Still throbs with a bliss and a grandeur that only one present may know.—*Annie Rothwell, in the Week.*

A SCOTTISH SCHOOL EXAMINATION.

How often since I came here have I been thankful for our excellent system of free education in Canada. Some years ago the Compulsory Attendance Act came into force here, and the people assented to it in the belief that they were about to have a free system of education. They found, however, that, besides being compelled to attend, they would also be compelled to pay fees, although heavily taxed for educational purposes. Children here are compelled by law to attend school at the age of five, and to pay twopence halfpenny a week besides. An officer is appointed to hunt up the babies who do not put in an appearance, and though there are many who, like the mother of Moses, are fain to hide the child a while longer on account of delicacy of constitution or tardy development, it is no use—"you pays your money, but you has no choice." The grade above the infants pay threepence a week, and above that again fourpence, besides providing books. About forty cents a month and books comes very heavy upon working men who have three, four and five children attending school; the more so, when it is considered that they are already taxed for common education.

In talking with a school trustee one day, I said to him, "What becomes of the children of a man who is out of work or sick, and has not the wherewithal to pay for his children's education?"

"Ah, but we have a fine provision for that. All he has to do is to tell the teacher, and the teacher sends in an application to the Inspector of Poor, who lays the case before the Parochial Board, and if it is found that the excuse of non-payment is true, the fees are provided out of the paupers' fund."

"That is to say, the fees of the children are paid off the rate which is specially levied for the support of paupers?"

"Eh—yes."

"But why not levy a tax for general education, and