

The Motto in a Wedding Ring.

A lover gave the wedding ring into the goldsmith's hand. "Grave me," he said, "a tender thought within this golden band. The goldsmith gravely, with careful art, 'Till death us part."

FOUR EVENINGS IN A LIFE.

By Marian Nesbitt.

FIRST EVENING.

"Glorious it is to wear the crown of a deserved and pure success. He who knows how to fall has won a crown whose lustre is not less."

The sun was gently sloping toward the west. Above, a clear, blue sky, flecked here and there with gold and crimson cloudlets; below, a shining bay, its waters all gleaming and glistening in the warm evening light.

There are many beautiful spots in God's beautiful world, but surely none more fair than this sweet Devonshire nook. What lovelier scene could any heart desire?

Across the smoothly shaven lawn a boy was walking on this summer evening—walking with down-bent head and a look on his face scarcely in keeping with the brightness and beauty around.

"Rex is a failure, I am afraid, and will remain so to the end of the chapter." How persistently these words rang in his ears as he made his way over the grass and betook himself to his favorite nook in a distant part of the delicious old garden.

It was a sheltered corner overhanging the cliff, bounded by a low stone wall, in the crevice of which grew many a tuft of feathery fern, with patches of stonecrop, and here and there a wallflower or gaily-colored snapdragon—a place in which to dream away the golden hours; a place to look back upon with tender regret in those after days when, ever wandering and ever weary, footsore and tired with life's hard journey, we would find our way back to the dear old "Land of Long Ago," where the sun shone brighter and the flowers smelt sweeter than ever they do now.

The boy sighed wearily, and leaning his elbows on the top of the wall looked out across the bay, a shade of keen disappointment resting on his face and dimming the brightness of his eyes. Very beautiful eyes they were, dark but clear—eyes that looked straight at you with an open, trustful gaze which spoke volumes for their owner's truth and purity of heart.

"A failure! An I really a failure?" he asked himself, despondently. With a bitter feeling of inferiority he recalled a scene which had taken place only one short hour ago. He saw again the look of bitter disappointment which crossed his father's stern face and heard his mother's voice speaking words of loving approval and congratulation as she glanced from the books lying on her knee to the handsome, exultant face of his elder brother.

Poor Rex! he was far too generous-minded to grudge Leonard his success; but his heart ached with longing for one tender word—one smile of the fond pride which fell so liberally to his brother's share.

He ran on and on, only pausing now and again to look down with ever-growing anxiety at the shore beneath, where the waves were murmuring with that mysteriously melancholy sound which always precedes a storm, and cannot fail to fill the hearer with a strange feeling of awe.

"Sybil!" he called, throwing himself, face downward, on the grass and looking eagerly over the edge of the cliff. "Sybil!—Sibbie!—Sybil!"

For an instant his voice seemed to be caught up and passed on from headland to headland as echo after echo answered his call. And then, in the silence which followed, he distinctly heard a child cry. Without waiting to reflect, he sprang to his feet and swung himself over the cliff.

It was a very small child—small even for her five years—with a sweet, little oval face, large, grey eyes looking out wistfully from beneath their dark lashes, and hair of the palest gold, clustering all over her head in tight little curls.

"What brings you here, Syb?" he asked, trying to speak reprovingly. He looked round and saw, to his dismay, that a sudden change had come over the golden brightness of the evening. Above was a dull, leaden sky, showing here and there long streaks of lurid light, and away to the west a bank of heavy clouds. Below a gray sea, moaning restlessly at the foot of the high cliffs.

It was a terrible position to be in—to have to wait, helpless, a hopeless, while death came slowly onward. Surely the bravest heart might well have quailed—the strongest will have flinched—at the mere thought of facing such an ordeal.

"What are you going to preach about to-day, Father?" Rex heard Sybil say, as they joined the group. "I am not going to preach at all, my child. I am going to have a holiday this afternoon."

"To return by the way he had come would have seemed impracticable enough even if he had been alone; but with Sybil it was altogether out of the question. The only thing to be done was to remain where they were till the tide turned. But when would it turn? He could not tell, and an involuntary shiver passed through his frame.

Narrower and narrower grew the band of shingle—nearer and nearer crept the sea. Rex moved up a little higher. As he did so he caught sight of a projecting piece of rock, almost on a level with his head, and a sudden thought struck him. Raising Sybil gently, he placed her on the ledge, and held her firmly there.

"Oh, Rex, how dark it is! And the sea is coming so dreadfully near." The boy did not answer. In truth, he was almost worn out with the sustained effort of holding her, and already he could feel the waves creeping about his feet.

"How many, many times these words had crossed his lips! Carelessly, sometimes, because death seems such a long way off when one is young; but reverently—never. For Rex, though outwardly just like other boys of his age, was, nevertheless, full of a holy fear. A keen realization of things unseen made irreverence impossible to him.

The storm still kept off; only a distant growl of thunder broke the oppressive silence from time to time. But night was falling fast; and now the waves rose to his knees, as he stood with one arm closely clasped round Sybil, while with the other he supported himself as best he could against the rock. He looked into the gathering darkness, and involuntarily the words of St. Augustine's prayer came to his mind.

"We are tossed about on the wild and raging waves in the dark night; and Thou, standing on the everlasting shore, dost behold our sore perils; save us for Thy name's sake."

Silence first—a silence that seemed interminable. But when he called again, there was an answering shout. "I'll get in as close as I can," cried Leonard's voice, across the water; and a few minutes later, Rex—half swimming, half wading—reached the boat with Sybil safe in his arms.

"Dear Mrs. Vyvian, how glad I am to know that your sweet little girl is safe," exclaimed a visitor, calling some days later. "They tell me Rex quite acted the part of a hero on the occasion. Really it was very charming of him. I only wish my boys were as brave."

Mrs. Vyvian smiled somewhat coldly. "Rex?" she echoed, slightly raising her eyebrows. "My dear Mrs. Melhuish, you are quite mistaken if you imagine that Rex was the hero. Leonard went in his boat and brought them both home."

"Really! I understood it was Rex who found Sybil." "Yes; he did find her. But I scarcely saw anything heroic in that. Mrs. Vyvian's voice, though low, was clear and penetrating, and her words were distinctly audible on the terrace outside, where Rex stood leaning against the stone balustrade. A flush rose to his cheek and the old pain crossed his face, but otherwise he gave no sign of having heard his mother's remarks.

"I seek a pure heart, and there is the place of my rest." Above—an ever-changing sky, beautiful with all the uncertain glory of an April day. Below—a fair and graceful scene—hills upon whose sunny slopes the grass was springing in all its early freshness; trees showing their first flush of green; larks singing their sweet, sad song; and all the world thrilling with the nameless yet unspeakable gladness of the spring.

"I say, Rex, hurry up, old man; we shall be late for church," called Leonard Vyvian's voice, on this quiet Sunday afternoon. Major and Mrs. Vyvian and Sybil had already started, and the two boys, as they hurried across the meadows, saw them stopping to talk to Father O'Neil.

"What are you going to preach about to-day, Father?" Rex heard Sybil say, as they joined the group. "I am not going to preach at all, my child. I am going to have a holiday this afternoon."

"Well, I don't know. I am used to my two sermons every Sunday; but I certainly think a change now and again must be very acceptable to my hearers." And Father O'Neil laughed as he spoke—such a happy, light-hearted laugh—it did one good to listen to it.

"But home is jollier, I suppose!" finished Father O'Neil. "Well, well, it is only natural, and as it should be. Now run off to the sacristy, both of you."

"Dear boy," murmured Mrs. Vyvian, affectionately; "he is so loving and warm-hearted. Do you know, Father, I really cannot help feeling the difference sometimes between him and Rex. Rex is so quiet and unobtrusive."

"Still waters run deep," quoted the good old priest, gravely. "Believe me, Mrs. Vyvian, there is no want of feeling in Rex; it is a very fine character, and he will make a great man some day, though I may not be here to see it."

"Oh, muzzie, look!" exclaimed Sybil, in an awe-struck whisper, a little later, when the tall figure of the friar, in his brown habit, ascended the pulpit—"he is just like my image of St. Anthony!"

The preacher—a man of middle age, though he looked younger—was very tall and pale, with a grave ascetic face that told its own tale of prayer and penance—a face, nevertheless, to attract rather than repel, as the number of those who flocked to him for counsel and advice could testify.

be felt, yet Father Anselm little thought how very deeply his fervent words had sunk into the heart of one, at least, of his hearers. Still less did he dream that during Benediction the call had come to one pure young soul. But it may be that some day in heaven, where we shall know even as we are known, the good religious will learn it and rejoice.

THIRD EVENING. "And he rose up and followed Him." Above—a pale primrose sky, deepening to richest gold where the sun had set. Below—"happy autumn fields" and glowing woods; dusky hills looking purple in the fading light, and the music of bells— evening bells—ringing out the dying day and filling the air with their sweet, sad sound.

More than four years have passed since that bright spring Sunday when Father Anselm preached so eloquently—four years!—not so very long, perhaps, but long enough to have brought changes to the dwellers in the old gabled house upon the cliff.

Leonard is away at Sandhurst, working hard, and passing his exams, as successfully as in days gone by. Sybil still plays in the pleasant garden—filling hall and corridor with her clear, young voice, and making the quaint rooms bright with her sweet, childish presence.

And Rex—where is Rex? At the present moment he is leaning against the low stone wall where we saw him first. His eyes wandered from the bay—still bright with the last rays of the September sun—to the red cliffs and wooded hills on either hand; then down into the sheltered hollow where the evening shadows were beginning to gather round the peaceful little town. How still, and calm, and beautiful it all was!

He looked and looked, and looked again, as if he would fain imprint the fair picture indelibly upon his memory; and when at last he did withdraw his eyes it was only to turn and gaze still longer and more earnestly at his old home—the home he loved with a passionate intensity none guessed and few would have understood.

"Give him time—let him look as long as he will at the dear familiar scene. He is about to make a great sacrifice—his eye, it is already made. On sea and sky and wooded hill he will look, as he is looking now, never—never again. It is an eternal farewell."

What wonder, then, that he lingers! What wonder that he turns back again and yet again ere he can tear himself away? And, as he stands thus, looking back along the avenue of years, the scenes of his childhood and early boyhood pass in review before him, and he knows that the old life has gone from him—gone away with its joys and sorrows—to return no more.

"Rex, Rex!" cried Sybil's voice, as once before on that summer evening long ago. And he turned away. He had bidden his last "good-bye" to the scenes he loved so well. In the days to come, perchance, he might visit the old home, but he would no longer have any part in it.

"The Master had come" and called for him; and, rising up obediently, and was going forth alone to embrace a life of voluntary poverty, angelic purity, unquestioning obedience. Henceforth he had no home—no earthly possessions—"the Lord was his portion and his inheritance."

He had not gone many steps when Sybil came running up to him, and put her hand in his without speaking. He looked down at her with a very pitying glance.

"In the early morning they had knelt side by side in the little church, and she had been with him again when he went to bid Father O'Neil good-bye. The good old priest was ready with many a kindly word of counsel and advice; but his tender heart was unexpectantly touched as he looked at the brother and sister, whose lives must henceforward flow so far apart.

"Good-bye, Rex; God bless you, my dear boy. And may He guide and comfort and strengthen you in the trials that, perhaps, are awaiting you in your new life—the life you have chosen for His sake."

sunlight falling on his kind, grave face and silver hair. But all this had happened many hours ago; and now it was evening—his last evening in the old home. Before tomorrow's sun had set he would be miles and miles away; while Sybil—he broke off his thought abruptly, and looked down at her as she stood beside him, a small white figure among the gathering twilight shadows.

"Oh, Rex, why must you go? I want you so. I can't spare you!" she cried. "Sybil, don't make it harder for me," he said, entreatingly, as he drew her closer to him. "I know it is hard for you; but don't you know that it is hard for me, too. Do you think I don't feel?" he exclaimed, with a sharp note of anguish in his voice. "Do you think it does not hurt me to give you pain?"

"No! no!" she cried, clinging closer to him. "I know how sorry you are. But, oh, Rex, I am so miserable!" "Poor little bird!" he said tenderly. "Listen, Sybil; God has called me, and I must go. But, no matter where I am, I shall always love you just the same, and I shall think of you, and pray for you, my own dear little sister, when I am far away. And you must pray for me, too, that God may give me grace to love and serve Him faithfully till death. You will, won't you?"

"Yes," she whispered, half frightened at the intense earnestness of his tone; in truth, he had forgotten for the moment what a child she still was. They went into the house then. He took her in his arms and carried her upstairs, as he had done so often in the days that were gone, and when he left her, went out into the welcome darkness on the terrace.

"Oh, how blind—or how ignorant—are those who say that the souls whom God calls are wanting in natural affection; that because they have given up all things they must necessarily be less keenly sensitive—less capable of the power of loving. No—a thousand times, no! Let no one dream it for a moment. Rather let us stand aside in humble reverence, confessing our own unworthiness, yet thanking God that there are still souls generous enough to respond to His grace."

Yes, indeed, these are the lilies in the garden of the Lord. Of such as these it is written that they shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, singing a new song which none but they can sing.

FOURTH EVENING. "One night the shadows linger And then the morning breaks, And God's own hand the burden From weary shoulders takes; And thou shalt see His glory, And hear His words, 'Well done!' The strife forever over." Above—a wild, angry sky, across which the ragged storm-clouds are chasing each other in mad haste. Below—a desolate winter scene; flat, uninteresting road, and a dreary waste of level country, where the fierce north-east wind sweeps along with unbroken fury.

In the foreground of this sombre-hued picture stands a large building with many windows and substantial walls, against which the wild north-easter whistles and moans in impotent rage, and then goes shrieking across the low-lying country beyond.

Beside the monastery is a Friday evening and there is Benediction. A bell had just ceased ringing when a tall, powerfully-built man made his way along the lonely, frost-hardened road, turned in at the wooden gate and walked hurriedly up the flagged path to the church. Benediction had just begun, and he found a place in one of the lower benches, kneeling, apparently, because those around him did so, and not as if prompted thereto by any spirit of reverence or devotion.

He glanced at the long procession of brown-habited friars with a curiosity not unmingled with contempt, an unpleasantly ambiguous smile crossing his face as the sound of their footsteps died away along the cloisters. He turned and looked around at the beautiful Gothic building, but without the slightest appearance of interest, and when the last lingerers made their way to the door he, too, rose and went into the porch.

"A cold night!" he muttered, looking up at the stormy sky; "cold and dark—very dark!" Some half-hour later the Brother in charge of the sacristy came into the empty church, turned out the gas, locked and bolted the great doors and went away, leaving all safe and secure for the night.

One by one the monastery windows grew dark. Only in a cell on the south side a young religious was still praying. It would have needed no second glance to recognize in that kneeling figure the familiar face and form of Rex Vyvian. But he is Rex Vyvian no longer. His name, like all else, he left behind him when he bade farewell to his Devonshire home on a certain September morning more than three years ago. He is simply "Brother Raymond" now—only one out of many students in the austere monastery at Lynnhorpe, whether he has just been sent to complete his studies.

He has changed since the evening when he and his little sister stood side by side in the old garden on the cliff. It is not the habit and tuncure—though these may, and undoubtedly do, lend a certain dignity to his tall, graceful figure. It is the undimmed expression resting on his calm, young face—an expression which is but the outward sign of the purity and grace of the soul within. His had always been a peculiarly interesting face; it was much more than interesting now. It was beautiful—beautiful with the untroubled tranquillity, the holy peace that God gives to those souls who love Him best.

The last three years had passed quickly enough to Brother Raymond. Quiet days, spent in prayer and study, succeeded each other with unbroken regularity; seasons came and went, but brought no change to the dwellers within those silent monastery walls. Outside, the busy world went hurrying on, but its excitement, its strife, its pleasure and its anguish were alike unknown in this peaceful retreat. And yet as the young religious rose from his knees one could not fail to notice that the shadow had not entirely left his face.

Why? Ah, why indeed? How could any feeling of inferiority reach him here? How could any sense of failure touch him? But, nevertheless, so it was. And to-night, as he stood alone in his cell, the old pain was as strong upon him as it had been all that summer evening, seven long years ago.

He gathered his papers together quickly, telling himself the while that, after all, his father's words had to a certain extent come true. Not with regard to his vocation—of that there never was, and never had been, the shadow of doubt. From the moment he entered the monastery he was perfectly suited to the life he had chosen. And, what was more, he was entirely happy in it; or would have been so, except for a certain something—a want he would scarcely acknowledge even to himself. In his humility he blamed himself for feeling it, not knowing that it was only the natural longing for some one to understand and sympathize with thoughts he was powerless to utter.

He studied, and studied hard; yet others passed him, not from any incapacity on his part, but simply because he lacked the power to express his ideas with readiness and ease. Life in a religious house had but increased his natural reserve, and though he was quick enough to see in what light his professors regarded him, they, on their side, were perfectly unconscious that a habit of self-depreciation was growing upon him day by day. They liked him; he was good—"as good as gold," they said—but not clever, no certainly not clever. Average abilities he might possess, but nothing more; and if he felt it, who was to blame?

In the days that are gone he had been forced to stand aside and watch another's success, and now—well, it was much the same now. Of the professors two, at least, were not merely men of learning and genius, good men and holy religious, but men of keen sensibilities and wide sympathies, with hearts to feel and to understand—if they had only known! but they did not. And so it happened that Brother Raymond, the student, came no nearer to being understood by those about him than Rex Vyvian, the schoolboy.

There are those who, all their lives, seem predestinated to take the second place. Why, we cannot tell. God knows. Perhaps He has a crown of special brightness reserved for these chosen souls, made like to Him by humiliation and contempt.

Among the professors was a young priest, Father John, by name, who had only lately been sent to the monastery at Lynnhorpe. His zeal, his burning eloquence, his holy life, and, above all, his indescribable charm of manner, possessed a marvelous attraction for Brother Raymond, who looked up to him with an admiration, reverence and affection that was none the less deep because it was unspoken. He was thinking of him now—thinking of a sermon he had preached not many days ago. How plainly he seemed to hear Father John's voice, ringing out clear as a silver bell.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say rejoice. Rejoice always. In joy and in sorrow, in success and in failure!" "Failure!" echoed the young student.

It had been with him in the days gone by; it was with him now. Would it still be with him in the time to come, he wondered, and then hastily repressed the thought?

Several hours later the great clock on the monastery staircase chimed slowly forth. Every single stroke echoed distinctly along the silent corridors, and made the after stillness seem deeper than ever. For a few minutes there was a lull in the storm, which had been raging with ever-increasing violence since nightfall. The roar of the wind had sunk to a low, sobbing moan; the showers of rain and sleet came only in fitful gusts, and as the last stroke of midnight died into silence an expectant hush seemed to fall upon the storm-tossed world—a stillness that could be almost felt. But, all at once, it was broken by the sound of a footstep passing softly but swiftly down the corridor. Brother Raymond heard it, and instantly recognized the light footsteps—light in spite of the thick leather sandals.

"Father John!" he exclaimed, involuntarily; and then, prompted by an irresistible impulse, he opened the door and looked out. Yes; it was Father John. The pale, misty moonbeams, struggling in through the large window at the further end of the corridor, fell full upon his slight, graceful figure and fair, delicate features. All unconscious of the grave eyes watching him so intently, he waited a moment listening, and then went quickly on toward the staircase.

For an instant the young student paused irresolute, then the same feeling which had caused him to open the door came upon him again, and this time with even greater force. Impelled by the same uncontrollable impulse, he went swiftly along the corridor, down the stone stairs, and on into