

Carleton Place

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SABBATH READING.

The Careless Word.

BY HON. MRS. NORTON.
A word is ringing through my brain,
It was not meant to give me pain;
It had no tone to bid it stay;
When other things had passed away;
It had no meaning more than all
Which in an idle hour fall
It was when first the sound I heard
A lightly uttered, careless word.

That word—O! it doth haunt me now,
In scenes of joy, in scenes of woe,
By night, by day, in sun or shade,
With the half-familiar that gently played
Reproachfully, and gave the sound
Eternal power through life to wound.
There is no voice I ever heard,
So deeply fixed as that one word.

When in the laughing crowd some tone,
Like those whose joyous sound is gone,
Strikes on my ear, I shrink—for then
The careless word comes back again.
When all alone I sit and gaze
Upon the cheerful home I leave,
So freshly, as when first 'twas heard,
Returns that slightly-uttered word.

When dreams bring back the days of old,
With all that wish could not be told,
And from the feverish couch I start
With burning brain and throbbing heart,
Amid its beating echoes clear,
That little word I seem to hear;
In vain I say, while it is hard,
Why weep?—was but a foolish word.

It comes, and with it comes the tears—
The hopes—the joys of former years—
Forgotten smiles—forgotten looks,
That as dead leaves in autumn brooks,
And all is joyless, though they were
The brightest things life's spring could share:
O! would to God, I ne'er had heard
That lightly-uttered, careless word!

It was the first, the only one,
Of those, which lips forever gone
Breathed in her love—which had for me
Relieve of harshness at my grief;
And if those lips were heard to say,
"Beloved, let pass away
Ah! then, perchance—but I have heard
The last dear tone, the careless word!"

O! who, meeting, sigh to part,
Whose words are treasures to some heart,
Deal gently, ere the dark days come,
When earth hath but for one a home;
Lest, musing o'er the past, like me,
They feel their hearts wrung bitterly,
And, heeding not what else they heard,
Dwell weeping on a careless word!

The Widow and Her Son.

A widow, who was I have heard,
Much loved for her "meek and quiet spirit,"
Left her home in the parish, early one morning,
In order to reach, before evening, the residence
of a near relative, to assist her to pay her rent. She carried on her
back her only child. The mountain track
which she pursued passed along the shore of a
beautiful salt-water lake; then through a
green valley, watered by a peaceful stream
which flows from a mountain in the distance,
and thence winds along the margin of this
lake, until near its further end, it suddenly
turns into an extensive copse-wood of oak
and birch. From this it emerges half way
up a rugged mountain side; and, entering
a dark gully, through which a torrent rushes
amid great masses of granite, it conducts
the traveler at last, by a zigzag ascent, up
to a narrow gorge, which is hemmed in
upon every side by a giant precipices, with
a strip of blue sky overhead, all being
dark and gloomy.

From this mountain-pass the widow's
dwelling was ten miles distant. She had
undertaken a long journey, but her rent was
some weeks overdue, and the sub-factor had
threatened to dispossess her.

The morning on which she left her home
was a beautiful day. Before
noon, however, a sudden change took place
in the weather. Northward, the sky became
black and lowering. Masses of clouds came
down upon the hills. Sudden gusts of wind
began to whistle among the rocks, and to
rattle with black squalls, the surface of the
lake. The wind was succeeded by rain, and
the rain by sleet, and the sleet by a heavy
fall of snow. It was the month of May, and
that storm is yet remembered as the "great
May storm." The wildest day of winter
never beheld snow-falls falling faster, or
whirling with more fury through the mountain
passes filling every hollow and whitening
every rock.

Little anxiety about the widow was felt
by the villagers, as many ways were pointed
out by which they thought she could have
escaped the fury of the storm. She might
have halted at the house of the farmer, or
that of the shepherd, before it had become
dangerous to cross the hill. But early on the
morning of the succeeding day they were
alarmed to hear from a person who had
come from the place to which the widow was
traveling that she had not made her ap-
pearance there.

In a short time about a dozen men mustered
to search for the missing woman.
They heard with increasing fear at each
house on the track that she had been seen
pursuing her journey the day before. The
shepherd on the mountain could give no in-
formation regarding her. Beyond his hut
there was no shelter; nothing but deep
snow; and at the summit of the pass, be-
tween the range of the rocks, the drift lay
thickest. There the storm must have
blown with a fierce and bitter blast. It was
by no means an easy task to examine the
deep wreaths which filled up every hollow.
At last a cry from one of the searchers at-
tracted the rest to a particular spot, and
there crouched beneath a huge granite
boulder, they discovered the dead body of
the widow.

She was entombed by the snow. A portion
of a tartan cloak which appeared above
its surface led to her discovery. But what
had become of the child? For all were
gone except the miserable tattered garment
which hardly concealed her nakedness?
That she had been murdered and stripped,
was the first conjecture suggested by the
strange discovery. But in a country like
this, in which only one murder had occurred
in the memory of man, the notion was soon
dismissed from their thoughts. She had
evidently died where she sat, bent almost
double; but as yet all was mystery in regard
to her boy or her clothing. Very soon,
however, these mysteries were cleared up.
A shepherd found the child alive in a shel-
tered nook in the rock, near the spot
where the mother sat and died in death.
He lay in a bed of cedar and fern, and

round him were swathed all the clothes
which his mother had stripped off herself to
save her child! The story of her self-sacri-
ficing love was easily read.

The incident has lived fresh in the mem-
ory of many in the parish, and the old peo-
ple who were present in the empty hut of the
widow when her body was laid in it never
forgot the minister's address and prayers as
he stood beside the dead. He was hardly
able to speak from tears, as he endeavored
to express his sense of that woman's love,
and to pray for her poor orphan boy.

More than fifty years passed away when
the eldest son of "the manse," then old and
gray-headed, went to preach to his High-
land congregation in Glasgow on the Sunday
previous to that on which the Lord's supper
was to be dispensed. He found a compara-
tively small congregation assembled, but
heavy snow was falling and threatened to
continue all day. Suddenly he recalled the
story of the widow and her son, and this
again recurred to his memory the text "He
shall be as the hollow of a great rock in a
weary land." He then resolved to address
the people from these words, although he
had carefully prepared a sermon on another
subject.

In the course of his remarks he narrated
the circumstances of the death of the High-
land widow, whom he had himself known
in his boyhood. And having done so, he
asked, "If that child is now alive what
should you think of his heart if he did not
cherish an affection for his mother's memory,
and if the sight of her clothes, which he
had wrapped round him, in order to save
his life at the cost of her own, did not touch
his heart, and even fill him with gratitude
and love to deep for words? Ye, what
hearts have you, my hearers, if over the
memories of your Saviour's sacrifice him-
self which you are to witness next Sunday,
you do not feel them glow with deepest love
and with adoring gratitude?"

Some time after this a message was sent
by a dying man requesting to see the min-
ister. The request was speedily complied
with. The sick man seized him by the
hand as he seated himself beside his bed,
and gazing intently on his face, said, "You
do not, you cannot recognize me. But I
know you, and knew your father before you.
I have been a wanderer in many lands. I
came to this quarter of the globe, and I
fought and bled for my country. But while
I served my king I forgot my God. Though
I have been some years in this city I never
entered a church. But the other Sunday,
as I was walking along the street, I hap-
pened to pass your church door when a heavy
shower of snow came on, and I entered the
lobby for shelter, but not, I am ashamed to
say, with the intention of worshipping God
or of hearing a sermon. But as I heard
them singing psalms I went into a seat near
the door; then you preached, and then I
heard you tell the story of the widow and
her son—here the voice of the old soldier
faltered, his emotion almost choked his ut-
terance; but recovering himself for a mo-
ment he cried, "I am that son!" and burst
into a flood of tears. "Yes," he continued,
"I am that son. Never, never did I forget
my mother's love. Well might you ask
what a heart should mine have been if she
had been forgotten by me?—Then though I
never saw her, dear to me is her memory,
and my only desire now is to lay my bones
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