

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## A KNIGHT OF THE XIX. CENTURY.

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## CHAPTER II.—Continued.

The moment Haldane finished reading the note, he left the room, and his mother heard him at the hat-rack in the hall, preparing to go out. She, supposing that he was again about to seek some of his evil haunts, remonstrated sharply, but, without paying the slightest attention to her words, he departed, and within less than half an hour rang the bell at the parsonage.

Dr. Marks could scarcely believe his eyes as the young man was shown into his study, but he welcomed him cordially as though nothing unpleasant had occurred between them.

After a moment of hesitation and embarrassment Haldane began,

"When I read your note this evening I had not the slightest doubt that I was the one to apologise, and I sincerely ask your pardon."

The old gentleman's eyes grew moist, and he blew his nose in a rather unusual manner. But he said promptly,

"Thank you, my young friend, thank you. I appreciate this. But no matter about me. How about my Master? Won't you become reconciled to Him?"

"I suppose by that you mean—Won't you be a Christian?"

"That is just what I mean, and most desire. I should be willing to risk broken bones any day to accomplish that."

Haldane smiled, shook his head, and after a moment said, "I must confess I have not the slightest wish to become a Christian."

The old gentleman's eager and interested expression changed instantly to one of the deepest sorrow and commiseration. At the same time he appeared bewildered and perplexed, but murmured, more in soliloquy than as an address to the young man,

"O Ephraim! how shall I give thee up?"

Haldane was touched by the venerable man's tone and manner, more than he would have thought possible, and feeling that he could not trust himself any longer, determined to make his escape as soon as possible. But as he rose to take his leave he said, a little impulsively,

"I feel sure, sir, that if you had spoken and looked yesterday as you do this evening, I would not have—I could not have—"

"I understand, my young friend; I now feel sure that I was more to blame than yourself, and your part is already forgiven and forgotten. I am now only solicitous about you."

"You are very kind to feel so after what has happened, and I will say this much—if I ever do wish to become a Christian there is no one living to whom I will come for counsel more quickly than yourself. Good night, sir."

"Give me your hand before you go."

It was a strong, warm, lingering grasp that the old man gave, and in the dark days of temptation and sin that followed, Haldane often felt that it had a helping and sustaining influence.

"I wish I could hold on to you," said the doctor huskily; "I wish I could lead you by loving force into the paths of pleasantness and peace. But what I can't do, God can. Good-bye, and God bless you."

Haldane fled rather precipitately, for he felt that he was becoming constrained by a loving violence that was as mysterious as it was powerful. Before he had passed through the main street of the town, however, a reckless companion placed an arm in his, and led him to one of their haunts, where he drank deeper than usual, that he might get rid of the compunctions which the recent interview had occasioned.

His mother was almost in despair when he returned. He had, indeed, become to her a terrible and perplexing problem. As she considered the legitimate results of her own weak indulgence, she would sigh again and again:

"Never was there a darker and more mysterious providence. I feel that I can neither understand it nor submit."

A sense of helplessness in dealing with this stubborn and perverse will overwhelmed her, and while feeling that something must be done, she was at a loss what to do. Her spiritual adviser having failed to meet the case, she next summoned her legal counsellor, who managed her property.

He was a man of few words, and an adept in worldly wisdom.

"Your son should have employment," he said.

"Satan finds some mischief still  
For idle hands to do."

is a good business maxim, if not first-class poetry. If Mr. Arnot, the husband of your old friend, is willing to take him, you cannot do better than place your son in his charge, for he is one of the most methodical and successful business men of my acquaintance."

Mrs. Arnot, in response to her friend's letter, induced her husband to make a position in his counting-house for young Haldane, who, from a natural desire to see more of the world, entered into the arrangement very willingly.

## CHAPTER III.—CHAINED TO AN ICEBERG.

Hillaton, the suburban city in which the Arnots resided, was not very distant from New York, and drew much of its prosperity from its relations with the metropolis. It prided itself much on being a university town, but more because many old families of extremely blue blood and large wealth gave tone and colour to its society. It is true that this highest social circle was very exclusive, and formed but a small fraction of the population; but the people in general had come to speak of "our society" as being "unusually good," just as they commended to strangers the architecture of "our college buildings," though they had little to do with either.

Mrs. Arnot's blood, however, was as blue as that of the

most ancient and aristocratic of her neighbours, while in character and culture she had few equals. But with the majority of those most cerulean in their vital fluid, the fact that she possessed large wealth in her own name, and was the wife of a man engaged in a colossal business, weighed more than all her graces and ancestral honours.

Young Haldane's employer, Mr. Arnot, was indeed a man of business and method, for the one absorbed his very soul, and the other divided his life into cubits and right angles of manner and habit. It could scarcely be said that he had settled down into ruts, for this would presuppose the passiveness of a nature controlled largely by circumstances. People who travel in ruts more often drop into those made by others than such as are worn by themselves. Mr. Arnot moved rather in his own well-defined grooves, which he had deliberately furrowed out with his own steely will. In these he went through the day with the same strong, relentless precision which characterised the machinery in his several manufacturing establishments.

He, too, was a man who had always had his own way, and, as is usually true in such instances, the forces of his life had become wholly centripetal.

The cosmos of the selfish man or woman is practically this: Myself the centre of the universe, and all things else are near or remote, of value or otherwise, in accordance with their value and interest to me.

Measuring by this scale of distances (which was the only correct one in the case of Mr. Arnot), the wife of his bosom was quite a remote object. She formed no part of his business, and he, in his hard, narrow worldliness, could not even understand the principles and motives of her action. She was a true and dutiful wife, and presided over his household with elegance and refinement; but he regarded all this as a matter of course. He could not conceive of anything else in his wife. All his "subordinates" in their several spheres "must" perform their duties with becoming propriety. Everything "must" be regular and systematic in his house, as truly as in his factories and counting-room.

Mrs. Arnot endeavoured to conform to his peculiarities in this respect, and kept open the domestic grooves in which it was necessary to his peace that he should move regularly and methodically. He had his meals at the hour he chose, to the moment, and when he retired to his library—or, rather, the business office at his house—not the throne room of King Ahasuerus was more sacred from intrusion; and seldom to his wife, even, was the sceptre of favour and welcome held out, should she venture to enter.

For a long time she had tried to be an affectionate as well as a faithful wife, for she had married this man from love. She had mistaken his cool self-poise for the calmness and steadiness of strength; and women are captivated by strength and sometimes by its semblance. He was strong; but so also are the driving wheels of an engine.

There is an undefined, half-recognised force in nature which leads many to seek to balance themselves by marrying their opposites in temperament. While the general working of this tendency is, no doubt, beneficent, it not unfrequently brings together those who are so radically different that they cannot supplement each other, but must ever remain two distinct, unblended lives, that are in duty bound to obey the letter of the law of marriage, but who cannot fulfil its spirit.

For years Mrs. Arnot had sought with all a woman's tact to consummate their marriage so that the mystical words of God, "And they twain shall be one flesh," should describe their union; but as time passed she had seen her task grow more and more hopeless. The controlling principles of each life were utterly different. He was hardening into stone, while the dross and materiality of her nature were being daily refined away. A strong but wholly selfish character cannot blend by giving and taking, and thus becoming modified into something different and better. It can only absorb, and thus drag down to its own condition. Before there can be unity, the weaker one must give up and yield personal will and independence to such a degree that it is almost equivalent to being devoured and assimilated.

But Mr. Arnot seemed to grow too narrow and self-sufficient in his nature for such spiritual cannibalism, even had his wife been a weak, neutral character, with no decided and persistent individuality of her own. He was not slow in exacting outward and mechanical service, but he had no time to "bother" with her thoughts, feelings, and opinions; nor did he think it worth while, to any extent, to lead her to reflect only his feelings and opinions. Neither she nor anyone else was very essential to him. His business was necessary, and he valued it even more than the wealth which resulted from it. He grew somewhat like his machinery, which needed attention, but which cherished no sentiments towards those who waited on it during its hours of motion.

Thus, though not deliberately intending it, his manner towards his wife had come to be more and more the equivalent of a steady black frost, and she at last feared that the man had congealed or petrified to his very heart's core.

While the only love in Mr. Arnot's heart was self-love, even in this there existed no trace of weak indulgence and tenderness. His life consisted in making his vast and complicated business go forward steadily, systematically, and successfully; and he would not permit that entity known as Thomas Arnot to thwart him any more than he could brook opposition or neglect in his office boy. All things, even himself, must bend to the furtherance of his cherished objects.

But, whatever else was lacking, Mr. Arnot had a profound respect for his wife. First and chiefly, she was wealthy, and he, having control of her property, made it subservient to his business. He had chafed at first against what he termed her "sentimental ways of doing good," and her "ridiculous theories;" but in these matters he had ever found her as gentle as a woman, but as unyielding as granite. She told him plainly that her religious life and its expression were matters between herself and God—that it was a province into which his cast-iron system and material philosophy could not enter. He grumbled at her large charities, and declared that she "turned their dwelling into a club-house for young men;" but she followed her own conscience with such a quiet, unanswering dignity that he found no pretext

for interference. The money she gave away was her own, and, fortunately, the house to which it was her delight to draw young men from questionable and disreputable places of resort had been left to her by her father. Though she did not continually remind her husband of these facts, as an underbred woman might have done, her manner was so assured and unhesitating that he was compelled to recognise her rights, and to see that she was fully aware of them also. Since she yielded so gracefully and considerably all, and more than he could justly claim, he finally concluded to ignore what he regarded as her "peculiarities." As for himself, he had no peculiarities. He was a "practical, sensible man, with no nonsense about him."

Mrs. Haldane had been in such sore straits and perplexity about her son, that she overcame her habitual reserve upon family and personal matters, and wrote to her friend a long and confidential letter, in which she fully described the "mysterious providence," which was clouding her life.

Mrs. Arnot had long been aware of her friend's infirmity, and more than once had sought with delicacy and yet with faithfulness to open her eyes to the consequences of her indulgence. But Mrs. Haldane, unfortunately, was incapable of taking a broad, and therefore correct, view of anything. She was governed far more by her prejudices and feelings than by reason or experience, and the emotion or prejudice uppermost absorbed her mind so completely as to exclude all other considerations. Her friendship for Mrs. Arnot had commenced at school, but the two ladies had developed so differently, that the relation had become more a cherished memory of the happy past than a congenial intimacy of their maturer life.

The "mysterious providence" of which Mrs. Haldane wrote was to Mrs. Arnot a legitimate and almost inevitable result. But, now that the mischief had been accomplished, she was the last one in the world to say to her friend, "I told you so." To her mind the providential feature in the matter was the chance that had come to her of counteracting the evil which the mother had unconsciously developed. This opportunity was in the line of her most cherished plan and hope of usefulness, as will be hereafter seen, and she had lost no time in persuading her husband to give Haldane employment in his counting-room. She also secured his consent that the youth should become a member of the family, for a time at least. Mr. Arnot yielded these points reluctantly, for it was a part of his policy to have no more personal relations with his employees than with his machinery. He wished them to feel that they were merely a part of his system, and that the moment anyone did not work regularly and accurately he must be cast aside as certainly as a broken or defective wheel. But as his wife's wealth made her practically a silent partner in his vast business, he yielded—though with rather ill grace, and with a prediction that it "would not work well."

Haldane was aware that his mother had written a long letter to Mrs. Arnot, and he supposed that his employer and his wife had thus become acquainted with all his misdeeds. He therefore rather dreaded to meet those who must, from the first, regard him as a graceless and difficult subject, that could not be managed at home. But, with the characteristic recklessness of young men who have wealth to fall back upon, he had fortified himself with thoughts like the following:

"If they do not treat me well, or try to put me into a strait jacket, or if I find the counting-house too dull, I can bid them good-morning whenever I choose."

But Mrs. Arnot's frank and cordial reception was an agreeable surprise. He arrived quite late in the evening, and she had a delightful little lunch brought to him in her private parlour. By the time it was eaten her graceful tact had banished all stiffness and sense of strangeness, and he found himself warming into friendliness towards one whom he had especially dreaded as a "remarkably pious lady"—for thus his mother had always spoken of her.

It was scarcely strange that he should be rapidly disarmed by this lady, who cannot be described in a paragraph. Though her face was rather plain, it was so expressive of herself that it seldom failed to fascinate. Nature can do much to render a countenance attractive, but character accomplishes far more. The beauty which is of feature merely catches the careless, wandering eye. The beauty which is the reflex of character holds the eye, and eventually holds the heart. Those who knew Mrs. Arnot best declared that instead of growing old and homely, she was growing more lovely every year. Her dark hair had turned gray early, and was fast becoming snowy white. For some years after her marriage she had grown old very fast. She had dwelt, as it were, on the northern side of an iceberg, and in her vain attempt to melt and humanise it, had almost perished herself. As the earthly streams and rills that fed her life congealed, she was led to accept of the love of God, and the long arctic winter of her despair passed gradually away. She was now growing young again. A faint bloom was dawning in her cheeks, and her form was gaining that fulness which is associated with the maturity of middle age. Her bright black eyes were the most attractive and expressive feature which she possessed, and they often seemed gifted with peculiar powers.

As they beamed upon the young man they had much the same effect as the anthracite coals which glowed in the grate, and he began to be conscious of some disposition to give her his confidence.

Having dismissed the servant with the lunch tray, she caused him to draw his chair sociably up to the fire, and said, without any circumlocution:

"Mr. Haldane, perhaps this is the best time for us to have a frank talk in regard to the future."

The young man thought that this was the preface for some decided criticism of the past, and his face became a little hard and defiant. But in this he was mistaken, for the lady made no reference to his faults, of which she had been informed by his mother. She spoke in a kindly but almost business-like way of his duties in the counting-room, and of domestic rules of the household, to which he would be expected to conform. She also spoke plainly of her husband's inexorable requirement of system, regularity, and order, and dwelt upon the fact that all in his employ conformed to this