

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## FROM JEST TO EARNEST.

BY REV. K. F. ROSE.

## CHAPTER XXIV.—THE TERROR OF A GREAT FEAR.

Long before Harcourt reached his law-office, he was satisfied that he had blundered foolishly, and done Miss Martell great injustice. Her right to refuse his unwelcome love was most perfect, and her manner of doing so as he understood her, had been most delicate, even in his estimation. At the same time she had never given him the slightest ground for his implied aspersion that in her pure, Christian life she shone down upon him with the cold distance of a "star."

He recalled her words and bearing in Mrs. Byram's conservatory, and the degree in which his unreasonable passion had blinded him grew more apparent.

"Why should I expect her to love me?" he asked himself in bitterness. "It is a hundred-fold more than I deserve, or had a right to hope, that she should put out her hand to save me."

He was on the point of returning twenty times, and asking her pardon for his folly, but that bane of our life—that hindrance to more good and happiness than perhaps any other one cause—pride, deterred, and Monday evening passed, an unhappy one to the object of his thoughts as well as himself.

On Tuesday pride was vanquished, and as soon as his business permitted he repaired to the Martell mansion, eager to ask forgiveness. To his deep disappointment, he learned that Mr. Martell and his daughter had driven up town, crossed on the ferry-boat, and were paying some visits on the other side of the river.

He now purposed to call again as soon as they returned, but was unexpectedly detained until quite late in the evening. He approached the familiar place that now enshined, to him, the jewel of the world, in both a humble and an heroic mood. He would not presume again, but in silence live worthily of his love for one so lovely. He would be more than content—yes, grateful—if she would deign to help him climb toward her moral height.

As he stood on the piazza, after ringing the door-bell, he was in greater trepidation than when he made his first plea in court, and was so intent in trying to frame his thoughts into appropriate language, that he did not note for the moment that no one answered. Again he rang, but there was no response. There were lights in the house, and he knocked upon the door quite loudly. A housemaid soon after appeared, with a scared and anxious face.

"Is Miss Martell home?" he asked, a sudden boding of evil chilling his heart.

"Indeed an' she is not. Would to God she was."

"What do you mean?"

"Faix, an' I'm sure I'm glad ye's come, Misther Harcourt. The coachman is down at the shore, and he'll tell ye all."

Harcourt dashed through the snow and shrubbery, over rocks and down steep banks that gave him one or two severe falls, that he might, the nearest way, reach Mr. Martell's boat-house. Here he found the coachman peering out upon the dark waters, and occasionally uttering a hoarse, feeble shout, which could scarcely be heard above the surf that beat with increasing heaviness upon the icy beach.

The man seemed nearly exhausted with cold and anxiety, and was overjoyed at seeing Harcourt; but he told the young man a story which filled him with deepest alarm. It was to this effect:

"Mr. and Miss Martell had been delayed in leaving a friend's house on the opposite side of the river until it was too late to reach the boat on which it was their intention to cross. They were prevailed upon by their hospitable host to send their sleigh up to a later boat, while they remained for an early supper, and then should cross in a boat rowed by an experienced oarsman, who was a tenant on the gentleman's place."

"It was quite a bit after dark when I got back, but Mr. Martell and the young lady hadn't come over yet. I first thought they were going to stay all night, and that I should go after them in the mornin'; but the woman as sews says how she was sittin' at one of the upper windows, and how she sees, just afore night, a light push out from t'other side and come straight across for a long while, and then turn and go down stream. I'm afeared they've got caught in the ice."

"But what became of the light?" asked Harcourt, half desperate with fear and anxiety.

"Well, the woman as sews says it went down and down as long as she could see."

A faint scream from the house now arrested their attention, and hastening up the bank they heard the servants crying from the upper windows of the mansion, "There it comes! there it comes again!"

Harcourt rushed to the second story of the house. A door leading into an apartment facing the river was open, and without a thought he entered and threw open the blinds. Away to the south, where the river enters the Highlands, he saw a faint light, evidently that of the lantern carried in the boat. Familiar with the river, the whole thing flashed upon him. In the last of the ebb tide their boat had become entangled in the ice, but had been carried down to no very great distance. Now that the tide had turned, it was coming back, with the mass of ice in which it had become wedged.

And could that faint glimmer indicate the presence of the one who never before had been so dear? Could Miss Martell, the child of luxury, so beautiful and yet so frail and delicate, be out in the darkness and cold of this winter night, perishing perhaps, with the lights of this her elegant home full in view?

Then, for the first time, he recognized that the room he was in must be Miss Martell's sleeping apartment. Though the light was low and soft, it revealed an exquisite casket, in keeping with the jewel it had once, but might no more en-

shrine. On every side were the evidences of a refined but Christian taste, and also a certain dainty beauty that seemed a part of the maiden herself, she having given to the room something of her own individuality.

It would be hard to describe Harcourt's sensation as a hasty glance revealed the character of the place. He felt somewhat as a devout Greek might, had he stumbled into the sacred grotto of his most revered goddess.

But this thought was uppermost in his mind. "Here is where she should be; yonder—terrible thought—is where she is. What can I do?"

Again he dashed back to the shore, calling the coachman to follow him. When the man reached the water's edge, he found that Harcourt had broken open the boat-house, and was endeavouring to get out the boat.

"Ye'll gain nothing there, wid that big boat," said the coachman. "The master has been away so long that it's all out o' order. The water can get in it as soon as yerself. The young lady's little scollop—the one as is called Naughty Tillus—is sent away for the winter."

"Stop your croaking," cried Harcourt excitedly, and help me out with this boat. "If I can't save her, I can at least drown with her."

"Not a lift will I give ye. It will do the master and young lady no good, and I'll not have your drowning on my conscience."

Harcourt soon found that he could not manage the large boat alone, and the matches he struck to guide him, revealed that the man spoke truly, and that the craft was in no condition for the service he proposed.

"Oh," he cried, "is there no way to save her?"

He sprang upon the boat-house, and there, away to the south, was the dim light coming steadily up the stream. The moon had not yet risen, the sky was overcast with wildly flying clouds; the wind was rising, and would drive and grind the ice more fiercely. It was just the night for a tragedy, and he felt that if he saw that light disappear as a sign that the boat had been crushed and its occupants swallowed up by the wintry tide, the saddest tragedy of the world would have taken place.

He groaned and clenched his hands in his impotent anguish.

"Oh," he cried, "What can I do to save her?"

He clasped his throbbing temples, and tried to think. It soon occurred to him that Mrs. Marchmont's boat might be in better condition. Hemstead was strong and brave, and would assuredly join him in the effort to rescue them. Without a word he rushed up the bank, sprang into his cutter, gave his spirited horse a cut from the whip, which caused him at once to spring into a mad gallop, and so vanquished him the eyes of the bewildered and terrified servants, who were left alone to their increasing fears.

"Save her, save her," muttered the coachman, as stiff and numb with the cold he followed Harcourt more slowly to the house. "It's kind o' queer how he forgets about the old man."

## CHAPTER XXV.—A TRUE KNIGHT.

As the dusk deepened into night upon this memorable evening, Hemstead stood at the parlour window, and looked out so long and intently that Lottie joined him at last, and asked:

"What can you see without, and in the darkness, so much more attractive than anything within?"

"Do you see that faint light out there upon the river?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've been watching it for some time, and it troubles me. I noticed this afternoon that there was ice coming down with the tide. Is it possible that some one, in crossing with a small boat, has been caught in the ice and carried downward?"

"Why should you think that? Nothing is more common than lights upon the river at night."

"Yes, but not of late. Since the last severe cold I have noticed that the river was almost deserted, and the papers state that it is freezing north of us. But it is the peculiarity in the movement of the light that perplexes me. When I saw it first, it appeared as if coming across the river. Suddenly, when quite over toward this side, it seemed to stop a moment, then turn directly down the stream."

"Uncle," cried Lottie, "you know all about the river. How do you account for what Mr. Hemstead has seen?" and she explained.

"Lights are very deceptive at night, especially upon the water," said Mr. Dimmerly sententially. "It's probably a hardy water-rat of a boatman dropping down with the tide to a point opposite to where he wishes to land."

"Yes, that is it, Mr. Hemstead, so dismiss your fears. Your brow is as clouded as that murky sky there."

"That comparison is quite oriental in its extravagance," he said, his anxious face relaxing into a sudden smile. "But then you are a bit tropical yourself."

"Well, you can't complain if I remind you of the tropics this dreary winter night; so I'll bear out your fanciful conceit. Your face a moment since was like a burst of sunshine."

"Your figure now is incorrect as well as extravagant, for whatever light my face has it is but the reflection of your kindness."

"I hope you do not mean to suggest that you have any tendency toward 'mooning'?"

"Mooning" is the indulgence of sickly sentiment, is it not—a diluted moonlight kind of feeling?"

"Very well defined. Does experience give you such accuracy?" said Lottie, laughingly.

"I can honestly say No; and most assuredly not in your case."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Lottie blushing at his earnestness. "I should be sorry to think that cold, diluted moonlight was the type of any of my friends' regard."

"You may rest assured," he replied impulsively, "there is nothing 'cold or diluted' in my regard for you."

"There is the supper-bell," interrupted Lottie hastily.

"What are you looking at?" asked De Forrest, uneasily noting the fact of their standing together within the shadowy

curtains. He had just descended from the toilet which, with him, was a necessity before each meal.

"Mr. Hemstead has seen a light upon the river, and bodes from it some vague danger to some vague, indefinite people. Come, Mr. Hemstead, come away, or before we know it you will be off on the Quixotic attempt to rescue what uncle calls a 'hardy water-rat,' that all the water of the river could not drown."

"Oh, I see," sneered De Forrest; "Mr. Hemstead wishes to get cheaply, standing here within and in good company, the credit of being willing to attempt a perilous rescue."

"You are jumping to conclusions very rapidly, Julian, and not very charitable ones either," said Lottie reproachfully.

"Come, Mr. De Forrest," said Hemstead quietly, "we will test this question of cheapness. I will go with you to investigate that light."

"Nonsense," replied the exquisite. "As Miss Marsden suggested, Don Quixote may be your model knight, but he is not mine."

"Now I didn't suggest any such thing," said Lottie, decidedly vexed.

"Come, young people tea is waiting," called Mrs. Marchmont.

"Well, I did," said De Forrest to Lottie, aside; "and what's more, I believe it's true," and he placed her reluctant hand upon his arm, and drew her to the supper room.

But Hemstead lingered a moment to watch the light, with increasing uneasiness. In his silent abstraction at the table it was evident to Lottie that his mind was dwelling upon the problem of the mysterious glimmer far out upon the river. Before the meal was over, he abruptly excused himself, but soon returned as if relieved, and said:

"It's no more to be seen."

"I told you how it was," said Mr. Dimmerly. "The man floated down as far as he wished, and now has pulled ashore."

The explanation fully satisfied the rest, and sounded plausible to Hemstead; and the evening promised to pass quietly and uneventfully away. Mrs. Marchmont's parlour was a picture of elegance. Bel, and Addie with her mother and uncle, made a game of whist at one table; while Hemstead in subdued tones read the latest magazine at another. De Forrest was half-dozing in his chair, for the article was rather beyond him; and while Lottie's fair face was very thoughtful, it might be questioned whether the thought was suggested by the reader or by what he read. But the article was finished, and for the relief of change, Hemstead paced the room a few moments, then half-aimlessly went to the window and looked out toward the river. His abrupt exclamation startled them all.

"There is that light again!"

A moment later he stood, bare-headed, out upon the piazza, straining his eyes out into the darkness.

"I feel impressed that there is something wrong—that some one is in danger," he said to Lottie, who had followed him.

"You will take cold standing here without your hat," she said.

"So will you. Where is your hat that you should talk prudence to me?"

But the others were more thoughtful of themselves, and were well wrapped and protected as they now also came out upon the piazza.

"Well, it is a little queer," said Mr. Dimmerly.

"I suppose some one ought to go and see what it means, said Bel, hesitatingly. "But then there are those better able to go than any one from here."

"Hush!" said Hemstead.

Far and faint there seemed to come a cry for help across the darkness.

"That is enough," he cried; "some one is in distress and danger. Come, Mr. De Forrest. The case has lost all its Quixotic elements, and you may now emulate the Chevalier Bayard himself."

"Oh, please don't go gentlemen," cried Lottie. See, the night is very dark, the wind is rising; the water must be very rough. You may just throw away your own lives in the vain attempt to save utter strangers."

"Miss Marsden is correct," said De Forrest, as if greatly relieved. "The attempt is perfectly fool-hardy, and I am not a fool. If some one is in a boat that is fast in the ice, he has only a few more miles to drift, before coming opposite a large town, where there are many better able to help than we are."

"Hush!" cried Hemstead, "do you hear that?"

Faint and far away, as a response to De Forrest's words, came again more clearly the cry for help.

"That is enough," again said Hemstead excitedly; and he started for his hat.

Lottie laid her hand upon his arm, and said with seeming earnestness:

"Surely, Mr. Hemstead, you will not be guilty of the folly of going alone upon such a desperate attempt as this?"

"I surely will; and you surprise me greatly that you seek to detain me," he said, almost sternly.

"But you alone can do nothing."

"As I am a man I will try. Where can I get the key of the boat-house?"

"If the young gentleman will go, I will go with him," said a voice from the darkness beyond the piazza, and which they recognized as that of Mrs. Marchmont's coachman: "I've been to sea in my day, and am not afraid of a little water, salt or fresh."

"Good for you my fine fellow I'll be with you at once," cried Hemstead.

"I've got the key of the boat-house, a lantern, and an axe to cut the ice, so you have only to put on your coat and hat."

"There," said Hemstead to Lottie, "a way is provided already. How could you wish to keep me back?" and without waiting for an answer he hastily seized his hat and coat from the hall rack.

But before he could spring down the piazza steps she