

CHOICE LITERATURE.

TOM'S HEATHEN.

CHAPTER IX.—FESTAL DAYS.

One rare May morning I was walking up and down the garden path finishing my cigar, and on better terms with myself than I had been for some time past, when Maud came cooing about me. She harmonized with the morning and my contented mood. She was so small, so round, so dainty that she was everybody's pet, and withal so absurdly dignified that she was nobody's plaything. In her the transition from childhood to womanhood was unmarked by those surprising changes that in some girls show an unprepossessing child one day, and an attractive maiden the next. From a wee thing she had ever been somewhat of a woman; to old age she would ever be somewhat of a child. Just now, in her light raiment, her delicately-tinted skin and her fair hair brushed back and fastened in some becoming fashion, she was almost an object of adoration; much like an angel, no way like a saint.

For a man who had never loved any women enough to feel that she *must* be mine, I was singularly susceptible to feminine influences. Maud graciously accepted my homage as her due, pleased with it as an evidence that she could coax me into almost any arrangement she might choose to make. She clasped her dimpled hands over my arm and walked with me up and down, voiceless, save her persuasive face. Presently I tossed the remainder of my cigar into a tuft of ribbon grass and answering her silent entreaty said:

"Well Pet, what now?"

"Oh Uncle, in two weeks I shall be eighteen!"

"Shocking! I supposed you not more than nine or ten at the utmost. What am I to do? Take off a few years?"

"No, no! I would not be older nor younger," chanted she gaily.

"What then? I know there is something to be done."

"Why you see it's an epoch, a crisis, and ought to be emphasized."

"By what?"

"A party, a grand party, in honour of the event, Uncle Doctor."

Now Maud knew that I detested crowds, parties, assemblies of more than a dozen or so, and was prepared for a sharp encounter, fully persuaded that she would come off victorious in the end. Seeing this in her mischievous eyes I surrendered without a struggle. She should have a party, a strictly elegant affair, stipulating only that there should be no more guests than could be easily entertained.

"Trust mother for that! It will be just splendid," and Maud waltzed down the garden path, keeping time to fairy bells that are ever ringing in the ear of youth. Returning she made me a graceful obeisance.

"Thanks, Uncle, for Hal as well as myself! Do you know the thing was his suggestion? He is just wild to get Miss Dyer here."

"What possesses the boy? He needs a cooling draught."

"No, Uncle," said Maud, sobered by something she saw in my face. "We shall all be cool enough. Hal insists on bringing North P. with him. I fear it will spoil everything, but Hal says No."

The next two weeks I kept to my office and my den, and thrust my fingers in my ears if any of the family offered to approach. For every thing in the house was upside-down and inside-out, and consultations innumerable were going on.

"Now, Uncle," said Maud on the morning of the eventful day, "you must look your very best to-night, for you are all the Papa I have, and we must do each other great credit." And before the guests began to arrive she came to my room, turned me around, looked me over, pronounced me satisfactory—only that I did not look sufficiently reverent to be her Papa; and suggested that a few gray hairs in my brown beard would be an improvement. As for Maud, she looked like a sunbeam astray in a fleecy cloud. I had not dreamed that she could be so beautiful.

"Am I all right?" she asked, surveying herself in my mirror.

"Yes, Pet, only I think I ought to give you a sedative to keep your head level. All the gentlemen will go crazy over you to-night."

"You forget that other ladies are to be present, some of them very beautiful—Miss Dyer, for instance."

Hal and his chum had already arrived and were dressing in the room above. Peals of laughter testified to their hilarity.

"Have you seen this North P.?" whispered I to Maud.

"No. Hal smuggled him up-stairs the moment they arrived. How he ever got him up there if he is half as tall as they pretend, is more than I can understand. Jack says we shall be frozen still in half an hour, and quoting you for authority that food is fire, has fortified himself with a good supper in advance."

"Make Jack hold his tongue and see that you treat Hal's guest with consideration."

"Yes, of course. But if he looms up so dreadfully what am I to do?"

"Get upon a chair and shout."

"Now, Uncle, you are worse than Jack. I shall laugh in his face."

"No, Maud. If he is so tall you will never see his face. You are short in sight as well as in stature."

Mary called and Maud obeyed, shaking her finger at me as she went.

As the evening wore on I saw that Mary had consulted my enjoyment as well as Maud's happiness in reference to our guests. I saw old friends on all sides; prominently Tom and his cultured wife. But I must own to a feeling of surprise compounded with uneasiness as I saw Mr. Dyer approach with Agnes on his arm. Possibly she divined this, for a little later she said: "Papa so rarely goes in society that I should have solicited in vain if the invitation had come from elsewhere;" adding as I thought a little sadly and reproachfully as her eyes rested for a moment on mine,

"you seem to have unlimited influence with him." It was one of those swift impressions that come and go, and recur after an interval. And I was so busy speculating how Mr. Dyer and Tom would get on together that I failed to give her words the attention they deserved. Then, too, Maud was hovering about for a chance to say unobserved: "He is not so very tall, Uncle. He hears me readily."

"Only about six feet six. See that Jack keeps out of ear-shot. I heard him just now making enquiries about longitude and talking of the open Polar sea."

That sent Maud off in a conical gale of distress, for she was as tender-hearted as a fluffy chicken. I understood her motherly attention to Mr. Duff for the remainder of the evening. It had an absurd side too that kept my risibles in a state of chronic irritation. She was so short and he was so tall and so ceremoniously polite, that he was continually vibrating between a straight line and a right angle whenever he addressed her. If he had been sitting and she standing it would have been more comfortable for both. To an observer Northrop Duff was all black and white, with a good, strong, manly face, and was, I doubt not, sufficiently magnetic to deserve his sobriquet. A theologian, evidently; and a man of mark in the future. As Maud fluttered compassionately about him I could think only of a moth-miller about a lighted torch.

Probably no one noticed the sharp tussle between duty and repugnance in Tom's expressive face before he approached Mr. Dyer with courteous inquiries and congratulations, as pastor to a convalescent parishioner. It was a thing to study—the antipathy of these two men, which both shared and neither could explain. I could see that Tom was holding himself with a strong hand, and admired his cool pluck, wondering if he saw the latent fury like a pent-up fire in Mr. Dyer's steady eyes, while he accepted with icy courtness Tom's congratulations. This episode once over it was a relief to see them drift apart into more congenial eddies.

Late in the evening Tom touched my arm saying: "Do you remember I once said that Miss Dyer was probably a heathen by inheritance?"

"Something of the sort," answered I, with a nod.

"It occurred to me just now, and I wish to take it back. It was uncharitable in the beginning, but I did not know how thoroughly unjust it was till recently. I have met her several times and find her a true Christian lady in every sense of the word. And if you have through me received the impression that she is anything else, I am truly sorry."

"It is all right, Tom," said I, giving his arm a little shake. "Your conscience troubles you unnecessarily."

"No; I say needless things when I, of all men, should be more careful. Look at Miss Dyer. Did you ever see a finer face?"

Following his eyes I saw through the open doors Northrop Duff and Miss Dyer sitting in the library, while Hal stood between them, leaning over the back of the tete-a-tete talking to Miss Dyer. How well the fellow looked; I suppose I had a right to be proud of him, and said as much to Tom.

"He is well enough," answered Tom, indifferently. "It was Miss Dyer I wanted you to see."

Miss Dyer seemed listening attentively, and when Hal paused she answered, while he stood quite near looking steadily in her face; and no wonder, for as she went on it kindled and glowed until it was something rare to see. It was a most changeful and expressive face, with a language all its own. Both men listened as if entranced, but they were too far off, and the hum of voices in our vicinity were too distinct to permit us to get at all the drift of their conversation. I had seen her only in her own home, in the characters of daughter and nurse. Now her ease, her simplicity, her culture, all told. It was impossible to look at her and not feel that, sympathetic and considerate as she was, she still somehow stood apart as if of finer clay, and yet a Christian lady as Tom had said, and that without the least shadow of assumption. She was marked too by the severe elegance of her dress which was of some sort of heavy pearl-colored fabric, that fell in folds like the drapery of a Grecian goddess. Her only ornament was a chain about her white throat, with a cross of opals set in Etruscan gold.

Mary called me off and I saw Miss Dyer no more till later in the evening. I surprised an old friend by breaking off in the midst of a remark and turning as if I had been called. Directly back of me and at the opposite side of the room stood Miss Dyer looking at me. A quick flush swept over her face as on the first night at her father's house she unexpectedly saw me looking at her. I went over to her at once.

"What is wanting?" I asked.

She smiled. "How did you know that anything was wanting?" and for a moment a light came into her clear eyes that quite dazzled me. But it vanished as quickly as it came, and she added, gravely, "Father is getting weary and we must go home. I was looking for your niece."

"We will find her;" and putting Miss Dyer's hand on my arm we threaded our way through room after room. She was quite silent and walked with down-cast eyes. There were several things I wished to say, but somehow not a word came till in the hall we found Maud searching for us. Leaving her in Maud's hands I sought Mr. Dyer, and found him looking as weary and annoyed as a well-bred man ever allows himself to look in society.

"Doctor," said he, as I accompanied him to his carriage, "I have seen you in the distance all the evening. Come up to the house and let me see you close at hand."

"To-morrow."

Hal was handing in Miss Dyer, his manly face glowing with happiness. How well they set each other off.

The next morning Hal and Northrop Duff went to New Haven to prepare for examination, for both were to graduate in July.

We heard from them almost daily, and as soon as examinations were satisfactorily over Hal came home, bringing his friend with him to pass the time till commencement.

All sorts of excursions, drives, walks, and what not were planned and executed, including of course Miss Dyer. They were a frolicsome set. And if Miss Dyer tempered their gaiety she also joined in their mirth, and they were all the

happier for her presence. Her low laugh was a pleasant thing to hear, and both girls grew brighter and more beautiful day by day.

Of course everybody went to commencement to hear Northrop's philosophical and Hal's oration. My previous opinion of Northrop's ability was confirmed. His head was the better of the two, but Hal's speech was by all odds the more popular.

CHAPTER X.—VACATION DAYS.

Early in July, Mr. Dyer, by my advice, resolved to spend the heated term in a clearer atmosphere. After a little hesitation, he pitched upon Lake George as the place most likely to suit him. Of course Agnes went. I was not a little amused to find, presently, that Hal and Maud needed a change of air, and that Lake George was just the place for them. Northrop Duff would also take Lake George on his way home. Well, things must drift as they would.

I cannot say that this summer proved as comfortable or satisfactory as previous summers of my life. Mary's maternal instincts insisted upon Lake George, and I begged her to take Jack along too. My solitary meals and the stillness of the house at night impressed me with a sense of a bachelor's loneliness as never before. Tom fled also, and I had no resource but my work. There was enough of that, for sickness and death took no vacation and made no distinction between the Lord's poor and the devil's poor during those long, sweltering days. A man's heart must be hard indeed who could feel no compassion. I found a certain satisfaction in spending myself for them, till I began to get seriously jaded in body and mind by the suffering, I saw and was unable to relieve. However, I stoutly resisted the attractions of Lake George, and when the heat and my weariness became importunate I ran down to Nahant a few days, failing to regain my accustomed serenity even there.

September with its cold nights and hot day: fulfilled the promise of a rainy August. An epidemic prevailed in the city and my absentees were refused permission to return till October. Mary came first with Jack, conscience-stricken, as she averred, for leaving me so long alone. She was anxious also to get Jack into the High School, the term having already commenced. Hal followed, bound for his medical studies at New Haven. And lastly, Miss Dyer, Maud, Mr. Dyer, and Northrop Duff, who stopped for them on his return from California.

I found them all improved and changed. Physically they were in excellent condition, Mr. Dyer excepted, and even he was better than I had supposed he ever could be again. A change not easily defined was apparent in all, and more pronounced in Hal and Maud than in the rest. They were happy enough, for anything that I could see, but thoughtful and quiet, and I missed their former frolicsome gaiety. Somebody had stolen my children and given me men and women instead. Hal, especially, seemed years older. I had failed to credit him with the depth and earnestness he was manifesting now. He was home a good part of the time—his medical studies allowing him more freedom than his academic course—and I had larger opportunities for observation. To my surprise he would remain silent for hours, or plunge off into long, lonely walks, returning thoroughly wearied; and I often heard him striding up and down his room till nearly morning. Of course there seemed but one explanation to all this. Contrary to my expectation, his violent predilection for Miss Dyer had settled into dead earnest; and I could not and would not speculate as to the issue. But even that explanation, patent as it seemed, was insufficient, as I afterward ascertained. Maud was touched by a thoughtfulness that made her more beautiful than ever. She still sang, but her song was no longer the gay trill of a lark. She fluttered between a smile and a tear, and was strangely forgetful. Who had set my pet a-dreaming?

No one seemed disposed to be communicative; I got the most out of Jack. It appeared that during their absence, when Maud was not with her mother, she was with Miss Dyer, and that wherever Miss Dyer was, there could be found Northrop and Hal.

"I think Miss Dyer liked me best," explained Jack, with becoming modesty, "though she talked most with Tall Enough," as he insisted upon calling Northrop Duff. "What is the difference? Tall Enough or Northrop Duff? It means the same thing," he explained. "I tell you what," added Jack, confidentially, "she's just bully! Hal heard me say that once and he half killed me. Then I called her 'Saint Agnes,' and didn't he put a stopper on me! What ails the young man? He's savier than a meat-ax. He said that if ever he heard me call her anything but 'Miss Dyer' he'd grind me to powder." And Jack buried his hands in his tousled hair, and looked more perplexed than ever I saw him before. But even Jack could not explain Maud.

Miss Dyer I did not see for some time after her return, though I called repeatedly upon her father with communications from our agent. Beneath his quiet exterior I found him as restless and importunate as ever, and his excitement could scarcely be controlled when he learned that our agent had ferreted out the fact that a man similar to Robert Lyon, but answering to the name of Norman Lee, shipped a ward an English brig bound for Sydney, Australia, three days after the affair at Mauna Loa. There was a possibility, a precarious one, that this man might have been Robert Lyon. The name of the brig and her captain were yet to be ascertained.

This, to me, vaguest of uncertainties, was to Mr. Dyer proof positive that Robert Lyon still lived. A man can believe almost anything that he is determined to believe, and Mr. Dyer was determined to believe that Robert Lyon was alive, and should live till he had done with him. He had become possessed by the conviction that all his mental discomfort and uneasiness would vanish the moment he made this enforced restitution; and the thought that Robert Lyon by death had made restitution impossible was too torturing to be endured for a moment. The shallower depths of this man's mental anguish could be sounded by his vehement refusal to believe that any one or anything could stand between him and relief. No; he defied Robert Lyon to escape and leave him this fearful alternative. Sometimes I wondered