SOLACE.

To solace the grief of others—
The shades on the heart that fall
Like a dreary night
O'er a landscape bright;
To lighten the gloomy pall.

To sweeten that fund of sorrow,
Deep in another's breast;
To gently dry
The tear-dimmed eye,
To bring to the weary rest.

Ah, here is the sweetest balsam
For grief our hearts can know,
To kindly share
In another's care,
To soften another's woe.

Who are the truly happy,
The blest of this world of ours?
Not they whose path
Never shadow hath,
Nor thorn amidst the flowers.

Not they who would bask in sunlight,
Through a calm, untroubled day,
Where no cloudlet lowers
O'er sunny hours
Which melt like a dream away.

While wrapt in selfish sorrow
Or sunned by a joy their own,
They taste but few
Of the pleasures true
Which generous hearts have known.

Ah, life hath an earnest object,
A high and noble aim,
A real good
To be e'er pursued,
Not merely a phantom name.

Lifting another's burthen,
Trying to aid and cheer,
Doing our part,
With a Christian heart
Is truest happiness here.

—"*Motherwell*," *in Messenger of St. Joseph.*

Laura Desmond's Choice.

BY AGNES M. STEWART.

PART II.

CHAPTER XII.—[CONTINUED.]

When half way through the park, Martha passed down an avenue of trees which led her to the high road by a side gate; then crossing the road she reached a copse, hard by which, and surrounded by willows, was a pool; its waters covered with thick weeds, the branches of the trees dipping into the dark waters; almost on a level with the grassy path beyond was the surface of the pool and wholly unprotected, so that it was an unsafe spot to venture near, save by the clear light of day.

The sun had not yet set when Martha passed by the copse, but she had emerged, so to speak, from light into darkness, for the heavy branches of the trees which grew in rank luxuriance around, utterly obscured the sun's light.

With her heart beating violently Martha awaited the coming of the Squire for she was the first at the trysting place, and looking at her watch she observed that it was within a minute of the hour.

Five, ten minutes, lagged drearily away, and exasperated that he should have been beyond his time, when he had warned her to be punctual, she was about to retrace her steps and risk his anger when she heard the dry brushwood crack beneath the feet of a person advancing in her direction, and the next moment the Squire appeared in sight.

'I am so glad you have come; why did you appoint this terrible place for our meeting?' exclaimed she.

'Out of sight and out of hearing, that is why; have you grown fastidious of a sudden, Mrs. Hazelton?'

'What have I done to offend you?' she demanded, 'that you look and speak to me like this, and I have so longed to see you?'

'Have you? Well, then, the wish was all on your side, and not on mine. By the way, Martha,' said this polished brute, 'what a scar you have on your forehead; it has not added to your beauty, I can assure you.'

'Could I help the accident? For heaven's sake come to the point, you are now your own master, Squire Ainslie,' and she laid her hand upon his arm. 'Are you going to make me your wife, or do you intend to condemn me to unutterable misery by breaking your promise?'

He shook off her hand and looked her full in the face.

'Get rid of that notion, my good soul; it is most annoying to me and painful to yourself. What is there in you, what has there ever been in you to lead you to such an idea?'

'I knew it would be so. I see through it all, Mr. Ainslie; you are in love with Ella Lester, it is for her that you are treating me with such barbarity.'

'Have the sense to speak respectfully of your superiors; now I have a word to say to you'

'And I to you, Mr. Ainslie, what should hinder me from going straight to the house, and telling your sister-in-law of our joint secret?' said Martha, whose voice shook so from the rage she could not repress, that she could with difficulty speak distinctly.'

'This will hinder you, the remembrance that there were two parties to the matter you allude to. Now to the point, woman, how dare you urge me to help you to commit bigamy.'

'Bigamy! 'What do you mean?' reiterated Martha; 'how often have I told you that Hazelton is dead.'

'Martha, you are really the most superb hand at a confounded lie that ever I met with. How dare you look me in the face and stick to what you say, when the very day before that on which I fixed to marry you, the man who called you his wife put himself in my way?'

The little color which Martha still possessed left her cheeks as Ainslie spoke; the clear olive tint of her complexion was now sallow, she looked as if she were about to swoon.

'Take the disappointment quietly, my good creature,' he continued, lashing the dry leaves with his cane as he spoke; 'chance as he thought it at the time (I now call it Providence), ordained that I should find the Squire better when I reached this place, and never thinking for a moment that you would purposely deceive me, I hurried back to London. I was in the Euston road a short time after you had left your lodgings; and whilst questioning your late landlady as to the time at which you had left, a man with hollow eyes and sunken cheeks came forward, and to my intense surprise declared he was your husband that his name was Hazelton, and that he had recently returned from California. I had to make up a few thumping falsehoods before I could escape, and the end of it was that to get rid of him I slipped a couple of sovereigns into his hand, took down his address and promised to convey it to you as soon as possible; and so my dear creature, you must rest content, you see that there exists an insuperable barrier to my raising you out of your position by marrying you.'

'And I, on my part, have something to say that will not be very pleasing to you, Captain Ainslie; the young lady who is now in the house is desperately in love with Mrs. Buzzle's son. If you do not see mischief in the future, now that my precious mistress may say day she pleases come across her old friends now living at Stepney, then I assure you that I do.'

'I'll not believe it, where is your proof, woman? Give me proof,' exclaimed the Squire.

'In this copy which I made from the original addressed to Miss Lester and picked up by me near the lake a night or two since, and in this intercepted letter which in view of our mutual interests I ventured to open.'

The Captain took them both and read them to the end, his fine features working with the temper he could ill suppress, whilst Martha remained cold and impassive.

'We must suppress this letter, of course,' said he; 'and as to this man Hazleton, he must be looked after; it may be a dangerous matter this of his return to London.'

He had turned away from the Willow Pool as he spoke: she had followed beside him, and bidding her to be cautious, as it would be prudent to separate and return to the house by two contrary roads, they bade each other good-night; then, acting on a sudden impulse, calling her back, he said:

'Give up your present position whenever you please; I will look to your future before long.'

CHAPTER XIII.

SIX MONTHS AFTER.

'That letter distresses me much,' said Dr. Lester to his wife, and he laid on the breakfast-table a dainty little perfumed note which the postman had a few minutes since left at the house. It was from Laura, and conveyed the intelligence that Ella was very ill; she seemed wasting away. Thus ran the letter: 'She was very poorly when she was with me at Torquay. There is something on her mind, and I believe it arises from the knowledge that you withheld your consent to her marriage with a young artist now in Italy; will you like her to come up to London? I need not assure you that I shall feel very sorry to part with your Ella; but when I look at her pale face and see her gradually wasting away before my eyes, I feel frightened at the responsibility of keeping her with me any longer.'

'Poor Ella, poor dear Ella,' exclaimed Mrs. Lester with tears in her eyes, 'you must write to her, Charles, and tell her she shall have young Buzzle as soon as he returns home. Which is the right thing to do my husband?—to see her laid in the grave, her heart broken with sorrow, or to let her have the poor lad at once. Mrs. Buzzle met me some weeks since, and with all a mother's pride in her honest face told me how well Ned was getting on, and that she hoped to see him back before next summer.'

'As you please, wife, but at any rate I think our poor girl had better return to us at once; her visit to her old friend has lengthened from weeks into months; do you write to her, tell her to come home directly and that she has our consent to marry young Buzzle when he comes back to England.' And as soon as the doctor's carriage had come to the door, and taken him off on his daily rounds, Mrs. Lester wrote a letter to Ella brimming over with love and tenderness, bidding her return at once and telling her she should be free to do as she pleased with reference to Ned Buzzle.

Then with the idea of placing things on a future amicable footing, the lady put on her walking attire and went to Mrs. Buzzle's house in Jubilee-street, professing that she had merely called because she had not seen her for some time past and feared that she was ill.

'I thank you kindly, Mrs. Lester; not ill, save but lonely and longing for my good man to come back and for my poor Ned; he be getting on well, mam, indeed he be; an honest, better fellow never breathed. I was very sorry, mam, indeed I was, that my poor lad ever raised his eyes to Miss Ella, because as how God has not put we poor folk in your position, but belike he'll get over it anyways. Ma'am, I do assure, on the words of an honest woman, my dear boy has never named Miss Ella in his letters to me for a long while past; and so, Mrs. Lester, I do hope the young people have cooled down, which it will be for the best, as I hope we'll all live to see.'

Now, in the present state of Mrs. Lester's mind, this long speech was not exactly what she wished to hear; there was a screw loose some where evidently. Was it that the poor young man had, when at a distance from Ella, felt that it was best to take her father at his word, and think no more of marrying the proud doctor's daughter? And as Mrs. Lester not unreasonably concluded this to be the case, she kept unsaid the words which she had come prepared to say to Mrs. Buzzle—words which she had made up her mind would bring happiness to the hearts of all concerned.

And with a few trifling amenities on either side, the lady and the mate's wife parted, neither of them understanding the other. As for the former, she turned away with a full heart, and, unjustifiably enough, no small resentment at the bottom of it, saying to herself:

'Well, if his love has cooled so soon, it was not worth having. Anyway, we can not go and proffer Ella's hand after our refusal to such folks as those.'

'And,' said Mrs. Buzzle, wiping away a tear from her eyes with her apron, as she seated herself in her little parlor, 'ye are proud folk, that's what ye are; and I hope my dear boy has got over his trouble, and will marry some good girl in his own class, as won't be ashamed of us. I was mistaken in Miss Ella. Not a line has she written to me since I sent her Ned's letter last June, and twice again since that time have I written to her.'

And then she went about her little duties, trying to think no more of the Lesters, but, do what she would, the good woman felt uneasy. She was sorry to know Ella was ill, for so much she had gathered from her visitor; and looking attentively at a photograph which Ella had sent her from Exeter, said she, as if addressing the inanimate portrait:

'Well, now, I'd never have thought yo'd have forgotten him—no, never. You seemed so loving and innocent like, so different from the dressed-up fashionable wenches one meets with, so simple and pure-minded, that I'd never have thought you'd have forgotten my handsome boy.'

Then with a sigh she sat down and committed the event of that morning to the diary which for many a long year she oftentimes, lonely woman, had kept, and duly read to the captain of the *Pretty Peggy* on his return from his yearly trip to distant climes. The owners of the merchant vessel in which he had so often ploughed the deep ocean had been so well contented with his conduct as mate, that they had promoted him on the death of the former captain to that post of authority.

Like herself the book in which the good woman kept her diary was large and bulky; moreover it was well thumbed; and save as presenting a faithful chronicle to the man of her heart, of the way in which Bridget passed her time during the long months of his absence from home, it was hard to think what purpose she could have had in view when the idea of committing to paper the monotonous routine of her daily duties first occurred to her mind.

Its pages were not over clean, for as may be imagined it was well thumbed, as Mrs. Buzzle, had been taught in her youth in an elementary school; nevertheless the large irregular and slovenly handwriting was legible enough, should other eyes ever pore over those well-filled pages when Bridget has passed away from life and its cares.

And so she sits down and writes:

October 15th.—A strange thing has happened to-day; proud Mrs. Lester has called to see me; she never did so before, which occurs to me is quite an out-of-the-way thing. We'll, it's a mystery, that's what it is; and one of these days, I'll be bound, I shall find out what was at the bottom of it.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOOKING BACK.

Some few weeks before the letter we have alluded to was received by Dr. Lester, Martha sat in her chamber reading the *Daily Telegraph*. Suddenly the paper fell from her hands, a moment since she had read a certain paragraph, like one bewildered, scarcely crediting the evidence of her senses. But there was no mistake; she had read aright, and scheming, plotting Martha is at last a free woman, without the committal of the crime she had once thought of perpetrating, and indeed would have perpetrated had she not been suddenly summoned from London some months back when she met with the railway accident on her way to Exeter.

And this was the paragraph;

'A man, poorly attired, was run over yesterday when crossing the Borough. He was so severely injured that life was found to be extinct shortly after his removal to Guy's Hospital. In his pockets were found letters which showed that he had recently come from California, and that his name is Thomas Hazelton. His body was removed to the parish mortuary where it will remain awaiting identification.'

Hard-hearted woman that she was, she thought of him for a few minutes with moisture in her eyes, thought of him as the handsome, reckless youth to whose ruin she had contributed; but the unwonted softness was as evanescent as the sunshine of an April day, the next moment a defiant expression lights up those bold black eyes of hers, and the lately sallow complexion is flushed; she looks as she did in the days that are passed; she will go seek Ainslie now, she will see if he dare refuse her; her mistress and Ella are at Torquay; now, this moment, why should she delay, for is she not the happy widow of the poor outcast Hazelton?

How he had taunted her of late; how he had insulted her before the face of that girl whom she had sworn to destroy. Let him beware, she has him in her power now, and a vindictive woman is more than a match for the worst man on earth.

And so she seeks him in the morning-room, she is pretty sure to find him there poring over the *Sporting Chronicle*: and as he was in the habit of staking heavy sums, and not unfrequently lost, those who knew him best were wont to prophesy that he would soon run through the fortune he had inherited; however, *revenons a nos moutons*, he sees Martha coming towards him with the paper in her hand, and somewhat savagely inquires: 'What has she come to plague him about; he is busy and cannot attend to her?'

'Yes, Squire, but you will,' replied Martha, drawing a chair beside him. 'I am no longer a wife, but a widow; I have always been so in name. Now I am a widow in reality, allow me to read this paragraph to you.'

He listened attentively, and a smile lighted up his countenance; but from whatever pleasurable emotion it arose, it vanished, and Martha saw also the consciousness of the power she possessed over him was one giving to his countenance an expression altogether unpleasant to behold.

'Now, sir, there is no hindrance or impediment in the way. We have linked ourselves together in our sets and injections, and I insist that you redeem your old, old promise and make me your wife at once.'

'My dear Martha, you jest; the thing is impossible. I will settle upon you a handsome provision for your life, upon my word I will; aye, even if I cut down the best timbers on my estate or mortgage the property itself to enable me to do so; but marriage, my dear, is out of the question, and——'

'Since when has it been out of the question, Squire Ainslie? Oh, yes, I understand,' said she, starting up and confronting him, whilst her frame trembled with rage, though from a prudent fear of being overheard she sank her voice almost to a whisper, and its low, hissing tones contrasted strangely with the angry countenance, so general is it that the hottest anger rages with the loudest voice.

'Since when?' she added: 'since you encountered that childish doll, young enough to be your daughter; that thing of pink and white. Think you that I have not watched you hanging on her very words, I come not, however to bandy speech with you. If I am to be your friend, well, you know on what terms; if your foe, even so let it be, but——'

'You will be the loser, will you not? You will remain a servant all the days of your life should you do what you are hinting at; but hark,' he said, as the sound of carriage wheels on the gravel path without struck upon his ear. 'I declare, it is Mrs. Ainslie. Yes, yes,' he added, 'I will think over all you have said, and—and be sure you shall hear from me soon about the matter.'

How well she had learned the art of schooling her countenance, so that it should not betray when she chose to conceal what was passing in her mind He withdrew through the glass door that gave egress to the garden; she by that leading to the hall, and with a face as impassive as if it was hewn out of a block of stone. She was now transformed into the decorous and somewhat obsequious waiting-woman.

But, like the barb of a poisoned arrow, the sting his words had inflicted rankled deeply in her woman's heart. Her love she had given to him freely and fully all these many years that, as she had truly said she was a widow in all things save the name, and this was his return.

She loved this handsome Ainslie still, and with keener eyes than Laura she noted how gradually he was falling from his social status, drinking, betting horse-racing, and yet over head and ears in love with the girl now under his roof. She paid no credence to the words he had last uttered. She believed they were said on the spur of the moment merely to pacify her, as one would coax a passionate child with a sugar plum; and as soon as her hateful duties as maid had been rendered to Laura, she sought the solitude of her own room, and sat down, not to give vent to her feelings on paper, (an act of indiscretion which Martha was too cautious to perpetrate,) but to prepare herself to fight her deceiver with the most formidable weapons she could procure.

A few days elapsed, during which she had no opportunity of again resuming her attacks on the Squire; but her eyes were Argus eyes. She was now more of companion than maid, and no sign or word passed unobserved when she was hovering about Mrs. Ainslie's person.

Ella had for some time been conscious that she was the object of the Squire's admiration long before he spoke to her in the language of love.

With downcast eyes and her face mantled with blushes on his having seized an opportunity to press his suit she informed him that her affections were already bestowed on another; she could give him no room to hope.

'Nevertheless I shall venture to encourage it, Ella,' said the Squire; 'it would not appear that your admirer, whoever he may be, can't be a very devoted suitor, or surely he would not suffer the lady of his choice to be so long absent from him; if attention and constant devotion to your wishes, and——'

But Ella stopped further tirade by starting from her chair, and she exclaimed;

'Mr. Ainslie, I must beg you to press me no further; I have already told you I have no heart to offer you; please let me pass,' she added, for he stood in her way as she was about to leave the room.

'I ask your pardon, Ella,' said he, 'for venturing to press my suit; doubtless I am very foolish to expect that a young lady over twenty years younger than myself should care far me, a man more than double her age.'

'I have already told you, Squire Ainslie, why I can make no return for the preference with which you are so good as to honor me; but may I beg you will never again return to this subject, and——'

But what she was about to say was checked by a shadow on the terrace without; and even as her eyes fell upon it, Martha, with noiseless step, emerged from the place of concealment, from which she had overheard the conversation, and looking into the room whilst not a feature of her face betrayed the least emotion, said she:

'Is not Mrs. Ainslie here, Squire, I wish to speak with her?'

'I know nothing of her movements,' said Ainslie, roughly; and raising her eyes for a moment she beheld his face darkened by an almost savage frown; very pleased at the interruption Ella hastened to accompany Martha in her search for her friend, inwardly determining that she would return without delay to her own home.

But there were those around her who did not intend that she should thus easily escape their machinations; and like the fly in the spider's web, the idea was no sooner planned than put into execution.

The next day Ella became very unwell, but her illness was set down both by herself and Mrs. Ainslie to a little derangement of the system, which could with ease be remedied. The following day she was better, but a little later her indisposition returned with provoking persistency; yet she could complain of nothing beyond nausea and langor, two symptoms which were set down by the Squire and Mrs. Ainslie to that very common complaint known as dyspepsia.

Day after day passed on in much the same fashion, since that on which Ainslie had made an offer of his hand to the young lady whom he had known in her infancy; and ever after the day on which she had refused him, so far from again renewing his suit, he seemed desirous to shun her society.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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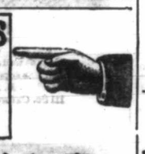

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Mr. Wm. Bennett, of St. Ferdinand, has had it some time for himself, and he has since bought it for his friends, who suffer from Rheumatism, and they have all been well satisfied.

I have never known any medicine to have had such good results about here as Simson's Liniment.

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