

CHOICE LITERATURE.

TOM'S HEATHEN.

CHAPTER XI.—A WINTER'S WORK.

The ensuing winter was one to be remembered. Early in January, Hal came home by his own special desire to study with me. At the same time Northrop Duff transferred his theological studies to the seminary here. It was a part of a pre-arranged plan, and appeared to be satisfactory all round. It is probable that they found more work and less study than they at first anticipated.

For some time the city had been unusually quiet and thoughtful. A few individuals gathered quietly here and there for earnest conversation and prayer. The weekly church prayer-meetings, time-worn institutions—attended by the church deacons, a few elderly women, persons recently afflicted, and the discouraged pastor, who sometimes felt that these withered meetings were like mill-stones about his neck—began spontaneously to fill up. Middle-aged people, members of the church in good and regular standing, who had not been inside the church to say nothing of prayer-meetings, for a longer time than they would willingly remember, came gingerly in. Old people with a premonition of a change for others, if not for themselves, and young people, drawn by they knew not what, came in singly or in groups—surprised to see one another there. A vague feeling of expectation, not easily defined, pervaded and depressed the people like a foreboding or presentiment of some coming event. If any one had asked, "What is the matter?" no one could have answered. Least of all, would they have gone to the few who were earnestly working and praying, to ask, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"

But amid the expectant hush came the solemn answer—the first few, heavy drops of a plentiful shower upon a thirsty field. The whisper went round from one Christian heart to another, "The Lord is here; let us join hands." Warm Christians, lukewarm Christians, cold Christians, began to feel the rising tide that sent in scores of unconverted souls to be saved on the shore; and the work went on apace. There were noonday prayer-meetings for business men, morning, afternoon and evening prayer-meetings for every one, and some of the churches were open all day. But the most effective work was done by the converts themselves, enrolling as laborers in the new service, going into the highways and byways, entreating, persuading, almost compelling the poor, the wretched, the vicious, to come, hear and receive the Saviour who died for them. For a time business was almost suspended, and the people walked softly as if expecting to see this Christ, who was so evidently present, visible on the streets.

Among the first-fruits of this movement were the children of our own household. Hal, Maud and Jack, dear old Jack! the most efficient worker of them all. I could but feel that Miss Dyer's influence had much to do in preparing them for the early acceptance of the truth. Indeed, I cannot say but Hal and Maud were already Christians, lacking only the assurance to declare themselves. Miss Dyer's joy was too deep for words. More than once I saw her and Northrop rejoicing in the new joy of their friends.

Often they gathered in our parlors before the evening service, Maud, or Hal, or Miss Dyer at the piano, and all singing. Maud and Jack soprano, Miss Dyer alto, Hal tenor and Northrop bass. Such singing I never heard before, and never expect to hear again this side the celestial gates. I doubt if the same persons could sing like that again under any circumstances. These fresh young voices, soulful and earnest, interpreted the grand old hymns till they glowed with a new and vivid meaning, or, taking up the spiritual songs in vogue, rendered them with so keen a relish that their souls seemed borne upon the breath of song into the very presence chamber of the Great King. Often I saw Mary sitting with clasped hands, listening, while tears of joy ran down her pale cheeks. Already she saw all her loved ones, living and dead, an unbroken circle in the heavenly home.

They went out to work together during the harvest, Hal and Northrop throwing aside their books for the time; Maud, Agnes and Jack with earnest solicitations bringing friends and acquaintances, anybody and everybody who could be persuaded to listen or to come. Jack gave himself body and soul to the work, forgetting to eat or sleep till compelled. He wrought in the High School, the Sabbath School, the streets, everywhere, and his success among the boys was remarkable.

In Tom's congregation the work was quiet but deep, and Tom himself was another man. I never saw his dark, sensitive face in those days without thinking of the Apostle Paul. His joy over those who came, his tender solicitude lest they should fail to make a full and intelligent surrender of themselves, and his importunate anxiety for those who held back, absorbed him day and night.

The season passed leaving an abiding impression upon the community, making itself felt in homes, in business circles, and in all the relations of life. But there were two hearts which, though blessed to overflowing, were still burdened. Tom's secret and most urgent prayers had gone up hourly for his poor lost brother, whom he still believed in the land of the living; and Agnes's soul was wrung with unutterable anguish as she looked at her father and thought, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and he is not saved."

To say that Joel Dyer, although confined to the house and wallied up in his impenetrable egoism, could live in the midst of this intense interest unmolested, is to say that a man can stand in the presence of a consuming fire and feel no heat. Before he was approached upon the subject, a new element of uneasiness had made itself felt, for which he was at a loss to account, and after he began to know what was going on in the city, he was troubled to the core. But to all the prayers and entreaties of his daughter he remained as stolid as stone. He soon made it impossible for her to talk with him. Attentive and intelligent as he was upon any other subject, whenever this was mentioned he looked as if she spoke an unknown tongue, or as if he heard not at

all. Agnes found this an intolerable trouble, to be borne only by laying it open before the Lord.

To me he spoke with considerable freedom, but he had made for his uneasiness a channel in the direction of Robert Lyon, and into this he shoved all disturbing influences to be carried out of and away from himself until this man should be found and compensated for whatever injury he claimed to have received. It was the only thing approximating to a wrong that he could be made to entertain in relation to himself, and even here he could see no injury for which money could not atone.

Early in the spring our agent returned with what seemed reasonable evidence that Robert Lyon was living, or at least that he was not lost at Mauna Loa. A man answering the description, calling himself Norman Lee, three days after Robert Lyon was supposed to have been lost, shipped before the mast on the brig Hercules, Captain Jones, bound for Sydney, Australia. While the Hercules lay at her dock at Sydney to discharge and reload, this man had protection papers made out by the United States Consul as "Norman Lee, sailor, native of Connecticut, United States," with description of person and age; which tallied precisely with that of Robert Lyon. He was evidently not a sea-bred man, and this would seem to have been his first voyage as sailor; otherwise, his papers would have been made out in an American or United States port. It was further found that he sailed with the Hercules for Liverpool.

Following the Hercules this was proved: that after a prosperous voyage, as she made the south coast of Ireland, a heavy gale came on, continuing through the day. The Hercules was deep laden and labored heavily. At eight o'clock in the evening she shipped a heavy sea, which threw her on her beam-end, swept her decks and carried her masts by the board. She was now unmanageable, and drifted till the light at Old Head, off Kinsale, was discovered, the wreck still nearing in, when shortly she struck and went to pieces in an hour.

Of some sixty souls aboard only seven were saved. One of the seven was Norman Lee, sailor. With the rest of the shipwrecked men he was forwarded to Liverpool, and there attracted considerable attention, especially among sea-faring men. One of the many who visited them was the American sailor then in Liverpool whose life Robert Lyon saved on the voyage from San Francisco to Hawaii. He at once recognized this Norman Lee as Robert Lyon, though just then unable to speak with him, and believed that he was recognized in turn. Later in the day he attempted to see him, but found that Norman Lee had just sailed on a steamer bound for Holland, instead of waiting and returning to America as the consul had advised.

It was possible that the sailor might have been mistaken, since this Norman Lee might only have borne a close resemblance to Robert Lyon. But even that doubt lost its probability in a few days, for, in looking over some old books in Tom's library, I chanced upon a volume of adventure, on whose fly-leaf was written:

"Presented to Robert Norman Lyon, on his tenth birthday, by his affectionate mother, Rachel Lyon Peebles."

His name then was really Norman, and if he wished to disguise himself what easier than to drop his first name and change Lyon to Lee. I could but admit that a strong case had been made out.

It is not to be supposed that Mr. Dyer's anxiety lost at all its intensity under these developments. He was like iron at a still, white heat. I wondered how long his nervous system would bear this strain before it became a total wreck. But even here, this man understood himself better than I imagined.

Some ten days after our agent's return, Mr. Dyer sent an urgent note desiring my immediate presence.

I found him controlling himself with difficulty, as he paced incessantly the long narrow apartment, more like a gallery than a parlor, where he passed most of his time. He motioned me to a seat without speaking, and for a little continued his walk, as if he was propelled by a momentum not to be overcome at once.

He made a striking picture, his long dressing-gown swaying about his tall figure as he strode, his hands clasped rather than clasped behind him, his shoulders stooped, his long, white face, and close-cut gray hair, that stood up like a brush all over his head.

After a while he stopped, opposite me, speaking in a suppressed voice that betrayed the excitement he was holding down.

"Jackson, the agent, is sick. He will be unable to do anything to the purpose for months. Meantime, this Robert Lyon will go to the Pole or some other equally inaccessible region, and I shall have to wait and wait eternities. Look there," pointing to a breadth of carpet where the colors and wool were worn down to the gray back, till it seemed a narrow, white foot-path running across a green field, "I have worn that within the past four months. Night after night I have walked there till daylight; and day after day I have walked there till sunset, with that devilish Robert Lyon following me step by step, waiting and waiting and waiting, till I could curse like a fiend if there were anything to curse. How long do you suppose it will be possible for me to endure this? I know, if you do not, that the end is not far off. I have got to do something or die."

I looked at the man as he stood before me, his blazing eyes fastened on mine with frightful intensity. He was quite right. It was action or death.

Seeing that I understood and acquiesced, and so made his task easier than he had anticipated, he dropped into his chair and continued: "Now I will tell you what I propose to do. I am going after Robert Lyon myself."

"You?" looking at his wan hands and thinking of his exposed condition.

"Yes. Why not? It can do me no harm. It will be a thousand times better than waiting here—a thing impossible much longer."

That he should do this, himself, had not occurred to me before, but looking at it now I could see no objection equal to the risk of remaining in enforced idleness with this consuming anxiety upon him. He saw, for nothing escaped him, that I acquiesced in this, too, and he added hurriedly,

"Now you shall know why I sent for you this morning." Looking fixedly in my face and gripping each arm of his chair as if nerving himself for a desperate effort, he said emphatically, "I want you to go with me."

"I?" and I rose to my feet. This was pressing his claim, real or imaginary, with a vengeance.

"Yes, you,"—with a forward gesture of his hand, as if he would put me into my seat again. "Wait—listen till I am through. You have worked incessantly the past sixteen years, giving yourself no time for rest or recreation. A bow that is always bent will soon break. You are not as well as you were a year ago. There are days when your work drags heavily. Give it up for a year. Turn your patients over to Dr. Hope. He needs them and will do well by them. You shall lose nothing. I will pay you and bear your expenses. You will have opportunities for study and observation, and will return a younger and healthier man. And," speaking slowly and positively, "go I must! Go, I cannot without you. There! do not say a word," seeing me about to speak. "Go home; think it over. Two weeks from to-day we must be off."

He rose and abruptly left the room. It was the most discourteous thing I ever knew him to do. I had no choice but to go home and think it over, as he enjoined.

He had presented his case with consummate tact. Joel Dyer should have been a lawyer. It was true that I had not been as well since the epidemic the previous summer, and that sometimes of late I wished that I could never see another patient or hear another complaint. No one but a physician can understand the weariness resulting from the incessant and harassing demands upon his attention, and, if he be at all susceptible—and he has no call to be a physician otherwise—upon his sympathies in dealing with all shapes and phases of human suffering. I have felt some days that I was a walking hospital; that I was made up of wards, and carried within me all the diseases and anxieties of my people. If life hung in the balance I was indescribably solicitous. If the sickness resulted in recovery my joy equaled theirs, or if in death, I went down to the grave with them and felt the gloom and chill as if I was also entering. All this a physician must bear, and carry to his next patient a hopeful face and encouraging words, even if he fears the worst.

That I could shake this off, and run quite away, had not occurred to me. The very suddenness of the proposal gave it a certain charm. It was like opening a door from a stifling room to the fresh air and clear sunshine of a broad field. Then, too, Joel Dyer had a claim upon me as my patient—a claim that I had tacitly allowed to grow to preposterous proportions, but still a claim that I could not conscientiously ignore.

I thought the matter well over, consulting no one, and decided that if he would consent to one or two propositions I would go.

Seven o'clock found Mr. Dyer eagerly waiting. His face brightened as he looked in mine.

"You will go?"

"Upon conditions."

"Name them."

"Let me ask a question. Is your daughter to accompany you?"

"Yes, certainly. I could not go without Agnes."

"Then she must know why we go, and the circumstances. I will be no party to any concealment from her."

He looked distressed. "Tell—Agnes—all—that?" said he, slowly, falling into one of his fits of abstraction. When he emerged he said with an air of remonstrance: "You do not know Agnes. She has peculiar notions. She will not see this thing as you and I do. She will think I have done some dreadful thing, and make a great time over a trivial affair."

"I think not. She is too sensible to make a great time over anything. At all events, unless she can be told I shall not go."

"Well, then," said he, after a pause and with a laborious sigh, as if he were relinquishing his whole estate, "you must tell her. I never can."

"I have your permission?"

"Yes; only make her understand that it is nothing worth talking or thinking about."

"All right. One thing more: I shall bear my own expenses, and shall take Maud if your daughter consents."

"She will be delighted; the girls are fond of each other. It will take up Agnes's attention and keep her from—" he finished the sentence to himself. Turning to me he said briskly: "You must tell Agnes about the journey, and have her hurry up her preparations, if she has any to make."

"She knows you have this journey in contemplation?"

"No; I have spoken only to you."

CHAPTER XII.—FOLLOWING ROBERT.

The next two weeks were crowded with work. Mr. Dyer left every thing to my management, stipulating only that we should get away at the time specified.

First, there was Agnes to be informed of her father's plans, and her co-operation insured. She was surprised, but not displeased, especially as she learned that Maud and myself were to accompany them. She asked no questions, and seemed to have no suspicions; and it proved a harder matter than I anticipated to tell her of this affair of Robert Lyon. She listened with bated breath. I did the best I could for her father, dwelling upon the existing and probably inherited tendencies in Robert Lyon to become what he was. But no ingenuity could checkmate her intuition or prevent her from having an acutely vivid sense of her father's responsibility. She made it sharper and more comprehensive than I was willing to admit. At the same time she caught eagerly at his desire to compensate the man. It was to her an evidence of coming if not present repentance. I had no heart to show her my impressions of the matter. It was evident that she could be relied upon to the utmost to help her father out. Even while I was speaking I could see her assuming by sympathy, and as if in some sense her inheritance, the burden of the wrong he strenuously denied and resisted.

When I had finished the effects were palpable. First, an