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NELLIE NETTerville; OR, ONE OF THE TRANSPLANTED.

By the author of 'Wild Times,' 'Blind Agnes,' etc. CHAPTER XV.—(Continued.)

It was done at last! Nellie had said the word which made her a wedded wife, and Mrs. Netterville folded her in her arms, and whispered, 'Thank you, dearest, thank you; for I know what this must have cost you!' and then placing her hand in Roger's, added, 'Take her, my son—take her; God is my witness that I give her to you without a fear for her future happiness.—To you in whose arms the father died I may well entrust the daughter!'

'You shall never repent it, mother—never!' said Roger, with that calm, determined manner, which, better than many words, brings assurance to the soul, of truth. 'I loved her from the first day I saw her, not so much for her brightness and human beauty, as for that higher beauty which I thought I discovered in her soul, and which she has bravely proved since then. Over beauty such as that time has no power—the love, therefore, that springs from it must last for ever.'

'It is well, my son,' replied Mrs. Netterville. 'I thank you, and believe you. And now, be not angry if I bid you go. For this one day Nellie must be all my own—to-morrow there will be no one to dispute her with you.'

She spoke the last words hurriedly; for the jailer entered at that moment to inform Ormiston that the prison was about to be shut up for the night, and that it was his duty to see that all strangers left it.

'But not Nellie—not my child!' said Mrs. Netterville, with an appealing look, first to the jailer and then to Ormiston. 'Surely you will leave Nellie with me?'

'They must!' cried Nellie passionately; 'for by force alone can they drag me from you.'

'Sir,' said the dying woman, addressing herself this time to Ormiston alone, 'add this one favor, I beseech you, to all the others you have done me, and let my child close my dying eyes?'

'I cannot refuse you, madam,' he replied much moved. 'But is your daughter equal to the effort? Would it not be better to have the jailer's wife as well?'

'No—no!' cried Nellie, answering before her mother, who looked half-inclined to assent to this proposition, could reply. 'I am equal, and more than equal. I would not have a stranger with us to-night for the world.'

'Come for her then at the first dawn of day,' said Mrs. Netterville, with a glance, the meaning of which they understood too well. She gave her hand in turn to each of the young men, and then signed to them to withdraw. Ormiston did so at once; but Roger turned first to Nellie, and taking her passive hand, lifted it silently to his lips. Not to save his life or hers could he have done more than that in the solemn presence of her dying mother.

He then followed Ormiston. The priest lingered a moment longer to speak a word of cheer to his poor penitent; but the jailer calling him impatiently, he also disappeared, and the cell-door was closed behind him.

CHAPTER XVI.

The rattling of the key in the lock, as the jailer shut them up for the night, came like a death knell on poor Nellie's ear. So long as Ormiston and Roger had been there beside her, she had, quite unconsciously to herself, entertained a sort of hope that something (she knew not what) might yet be devised for the solace of her mother; and now that they were gone indeed, she felt as people feel when the physician takes his leave of his dying patient, thus tacitly confessing that all hope is over. The lamp which, in obedience to a word from Ormiston, the jailer had brought in trimmed and lighted for the night revealed the cell to her in all its bleak reality; and as she glanced from the straw pallet, which at Netterville they would have hesitated to place beneath a beggar, to the pitcher of cold water, which was the only refreshment provided for the dying woman, Nellie felt anew such a sense of her mother's misery and of her own inability to procure her comfort, that, unable to utter a single syllable, she sat for a few moments by her side weeping hopelessly and helplessly as a child. Mrs. Netterville heard her sobbing, and, after waiting a few minutes in hopes the paroxysm would subside, said gently:

'Nellie—my little one—weep not so bitterly, I entreat you; you know not how it pains me.'

'How can I help it, mother?' sobbed the girl, unable to conceal the thought uppermost in her own mind. 'You suffer, and the lowest scullion in the kitchen of Netterville would have deemed herself ill-used in such poverty as this!'

'Is that all, my child?' said her mother, with a faint smile. 'Nay, dear Nellie, you may believe me, that to a soul which feels itself within an hour of eternity it is of little moment whether straw or satin support the body it is leaving.—Eternity!—yes, eternity!' she murmured to herself. 'Alas, alas! how little do we realize in the short days of time the awful significance of that word, for ever!'

'Mother, you are not afraid?' burst from Nellie's lips, a new and hitherto untought of anxiety rushing to her mind.

'Afraid?' Mrs. Netterville echoed the expression with a smile. 'No, my daughter, by the grace of God and goodness of our Lady I am not afraid. Nevertheless eternity, with its ministering angel Death, are awful things to look on, Nellie; and if I could smile at aught which makes you weep, it would be to think that such a silly grievance as a straw pallet could add to their awfulness in your eyes.'

'Not to their awfulness, mother,' Nellie sobbed, 'but to their sorrow; it is such a pain to see you comfortless.'

'And has no one else been comfortless in death?' Mrs. Netterville whispered almost reproachfully. 'Only consider, Nellie, this straw pallet which you lament so bitterly is a very couch of down compared to His, when he laid him down upon the hard wood of the cross to die.'

'Mother, forgive me; I never thought of that,' said Nellie humbly; 'I only thought of your discomfort.'

'Think of nothing now, dear Nellie, but this one word of Scripture, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord;" and hope and pray that it may be so with me to-night. Now, dry your eyes and listen, for I have much to say and but little time left wherein to say it. Dry your eyes for I cannot bear to see you weeping thus. Your tears have almost the power to make me repine at death.'

That last hint was sufficient. Nellie resolutely checked her tears, and laid her head down on her mother's pillow, in order that the latter might speak to her with less danger of fatigue.

Then, in a few earnest, touching words, Mrs. Netterville set before her daughter the duties of her new state of life, and gave advice, which, precious as it would have been at any time, was doubly precious then, coming as it did from the lips of a dying mother; after which, true to an idea ever uppermost in the Irish mind, and which she had too thoroughly adopted her husband's country not to feel as keenly upon almost as he could have done himself, she adverted to her own place of burial.

'It cannot be at Netterville, I know,' she said; 'I may not sleep, as I had ever hoped, by the side of my brave husband! But in your new western home, dear Nellie,—in your new western home, where the churches, I believe, are yet undesecrated—there, if it be possible, I would gladly take my rest—there, where you can come sometimes to pray for your poor mother, and where, when my husband's father follows me, as no doubt he must full soon, he can be laid quietly to sleep beside me.'

She paused and Nellie muttered something, she hardly knew what, which she hoped would sound like an assent in her mother's ears. Not for worlds would she have saddened her at such a moment by allowing her to discover that Roger, like themselves, had been robbed of his inheritance, and that, instead of that quiet western home of which she spoke so confidently, her wedded life with him must be spent of necessity in a foreign land.

Whatever she did or did not say, her mother evidently fancied it was a promised conformity with her wishes, and went on in that low, rambling way peculiar to the dying.

'It was not thus—not thus that I had thought to visit that wild land. I dreamed of a resting-place and a welcome, a meeting of mingled joy and sadness, and then a homely life, and at its close a peaceful ending. But it is better as it is—much better. Our next meeting will be all of joy—joy in that eternal home where God gathers together his beloved ones, and bids them smile in the sunshine of his presence. Yes, yes, it is better as it is!'

As God wills. He knows best; he knows— and then Nellie stopped, powerless to complete the sentence.

'Remember me to my father, Nellie,' Mrs. Netterville continued faintly—'for father I may truly call him who has been in very deed a parent to me ever since I was wedded to his son.—And poor Hamish, also—let him not think himself forgotten, and tell him especially of the gratitude I feel for this great consolation procured me by his faithful service—my Nellie's heart to rest on in dying—my Nellie's hands to close my eyes in death.'

The last words were barely audible, and, after they were uttered, Mrs. Netterville lay for a long time so mute and still that, fancying she was asleep, Nellie hardly dared to move, or even, almost, to breathe, lest she should disturb

her. At last she felt her mother's hand steal gently in search of hers.

'Your hand, dear Nellie,' she whispered softly. 'Nay, do not speak, my daughter, but take my hand in yours, that I may feel, when I cannot see, the comfort of your presence.'

Nellie took her mother's hand in hers. It was as cold as ice, and she gently tried to chafe it. But the movement disturbed the dying woman.

'It prevents me thinking, Nellie,' she whispered faintly, 'and my thoughts are very sweet.'

The words sent a gust of tenderness and joy to Nellie's heart, telling her, as they did, that her mother's was at peace. But the physical condition of that poor mother still weighed heavily on her soul, and taking the mantle from her own shoulders, she laid it on the bed, hoping thus, gradually and imperceptibly, to restore warmth to the failing system. Mrs. Netterville perceived what she had done, and, true to that forgetfulness of self which had been the chief characteristic of her life, she would not have it so. 'Nay, nay, child,' she murmured as well as she could, for she was by this time well nigh senseless, 'put it on again, for you need it, and I do not. This death chill is not pain.'

She tried to push it from her as she spoke, and became so uneasy that Nellie, in order to calm her was forced to resume the garment.

Satisfied on this point, her mother closed her eyes like a weary child, and fell into a dozing slumber. It was the stupor preceding death; but Nellie, never suspecting this, felt thankful that her mother's hacking cough had ceased, and that her breathing had become less painful. For more than an hour she sat thus, her mother's hand in hers—praying, watching, weeping—weeping silent, soundless tears—not sobbing, lest it should disturb the sleeper.

The night passed onward in its course, but day was yet far off when the lamp began to waver. Sometimes it flickered and sputtered as if just going to be extinguished, and then again it would flare up suddenly, casting strange shadows through the gloomy space, and deepening the pallor on the sleeper's brow, until it almost seemed as if she were dead already. Lower still, and lower, after each of these fresh spurts, it sank, while Nellie watched it nervously; but just as she fancied that it had actually died out, it flashed up high and bright again, full upon her mother's face. Nellie turned eagerly to gaze once more upon those dark features. Even as she did so a rush of darkness seemed to fill the cell—darkness that could be almost felt—and a pang seized upon the poor girl's heart, for she knew at once by intuition that the lamp was now gone indeed, and that she had looked for the last time on the face of her living mother.

The sudden change from light to darkness seemed somehow to disturb the invalid. She opened her eyes wearily, and something like a shudder passed over her; but when she felt her daughter's hand still clasping hers, a heavenly smile (nity that Nellie could not see it then—she saw its shadow on the dead face next day, however) settled on her features, and she whispered:

'You here still, dear child? Thank God—thank God for that!'

'Mother, what would you? Nellie asked amid her tears.

'It is coming, Nellie; be not frightened, dearest. It is coming like a gentle sleep. Pray for me, dear one; pray loud, that I may hear you.'

What prayer could Nellie say at such a moment? An orphan already by the loss of her father, she was about to be doubly orphaned in her mother's death, and her thoughts turned naturally and spontaneously towards that other Parent whose home is heaven, and who, Father as he is to each of us, has pledged himself to be so in a yet more especial and individual manner to the fatherless of his earthly kingdom.

The words of the 'Our Father' seemed to rise unbidden to her lips.

'Our Father who art in heaven.'

'Who art in heaven,' her mother repeated after her; and then came a pause of sweet and solemn meditation.

'Thy kingdom come,' Nellie once more found voice to say. Mrs. Netterville had ever kept the desire of that kingdom in her heart of hearts. Surely He was now calling her to enjoy it in eternity! So Nellie thought, and the thought gave her strength and courage to go on.

'Thy will be done!'—that will which was calling her last parent from her side. Nellie sobbed aloud as she uttered the words; but Mrs. Netterville took them up, and in a voice of ineffable love and sweetness, kept repeating over and over again, as if she could never weary of the sentiment:

'Thy will be done; Thy will—Thy will—Thy will, ever merciful and to be adored—Thy will, my God, my Father, and my Redeemer—Thy will, not mine, be done!'

Nellie listened until she almost felt as if she

herself were standing with her mother on the threshold of eternity. A sweet and awful calmness settled on her soul. She knew intuitively that her mother was in the very act of dying, but she no longer felt fear or sorrow. It was as if the Judge of the living and the dead, not stern and exacting, but tender and approving, was descending in person to that bed of death to speak the sentence of his faithful servant. It was as if saints and angels were crowding after him, bowed down, indeed, beneath his awful presence, but yet glad and jubilant over the crowning of a sister spirit, and bringing the songs and sweetness of heaven itself on the rustling of their snowy wings. And in the midst of such thoughts as these, Nellie still could hear her mother's voice repeating, 'Thy will, my God, not mine, be done!'

Fainter still and fainter grew that voice, as the soul which spoke by it receded toward eternity; then all at once it died away, and Nellie felt that the last word had been said in heaven.

It was very dark, now, and very cold—the cold that precedes the dawn—cold in Nellie's heart within, and cold in the outside world around her. She shivered, and was scarcely conscious she did so. Was her mother really dead? She knew it, and yet could scarce believe it. For a little while she knelt there still, waiting and holding in her breath, in the vague, faint hope that once more, if it were even for the last time, once more that sweet, plaintive voice might greet her longing ear. But it never came again. At last, by a great effort, she put forth her trembling hand and touched her mother's face. It was already growing cold, with that strange, hard coldness which makes the face of the dead like a marble mask to the living hands that touch it. She shuddered; nevertheless, with an instinctive feeling of what was right and proper by the dead, she did not withdraw it until she had pressed it gently on the eyelids, and so closed them, without almost an effort.

That done, she knelt down once more, and, hiding her face in the scanty bedclothes, tried to pray.

Day began to dawn at last, and a few sad rays forced their way into that gloomy cell; but Nellie never saw them. Sounds began to come in from the newly-awakened city; but Nellie never heard them. The prison itself shook off its slumbers, and there was a slamming of distant doors and an occasional hurried step along the passages; and still she took no heed. She knew, in a vague, careless way, that at one time or another some one would be sent to her assistance, and that was all she thought or cared about it. In the meantime, she prayed, or tried to pray; but when at last they did come, they found her stretched upon the floor, as cold, almost, and quite as unconscious, as her dead mother.

CHAPTER XVII.

'To the memory of Francis, Twelfth Baron of Netterville, one of the Transplanted, and of Mary, the widow of his only son.'

Nellie stooped to decipher the inscription; but it may be doubted if she saw aught save the stone upon which Hamish, in obedience to his master's dying orders, had engraved it, for her eyes were full of tears. A hurried journey to the west, another death bed, and a few weeks more of tears and renewed sense of desolation had followed the events recorded in our last chapter, and then at last a holy calmness settled upon Nellie's soul—a calmness and a happiness which was all the more likely to endure that it was founded upon past sorrows bravely met and meekly borne, in a spirit of true and loving resignation to the will of Him who had laid them on her shoulders. From the day of her departure from Clare Island, the old lord had drooped like a plant deprived of sunshine; and he died on the very evening of her return, his hand in hers, smiling upon her and her brave husband, and leaving for only vengeance on his foes the inscription which heads this chapter, to be engraved upon his tombstone.

Nellie laid him to rest beside her mother; for through the kindness of Ormiston she had been enabled to carry out Mrs. Netterville's dying wishes, and to bear her remains to that western shore which she had so fondly and so vainly fancied was to be her daughter's future home.—Ormiston had done yet more. He had obtained a reversal of the sentence of outlawry against Roger, coupled with the usual permission to 'beat his drum,' as it was called, for recruits to follow his banner into foreign lands, to fight in the armies of foreign kings. It was the evil policy of those evil times.

To rid Ireland of the Irish was the grand panacea for the woes of Ireland, the only one her rulers ever recognized, and of which, therefore, they averted themselves most largely, careless or unconscious of the fatal element of

strength they were thus flinging to their foes. As a native chieftain and a well-tried soldier, Roger had a double claim upon his people; and short as had been the time allotted to him for the purpose, fifty men, of the same breed and mettle as the soldiers who fought at a later period against an English king until he cursed in the bitterness of his heart the laws which had deprived him of such subjects, had already obeyed his summons. They were assembled under the temporary command of Hamish, near the tower, waiting the moment for embarkation, and the ship that was to convey them to their destination was riding at single anchor in the bay, on that very morning when Nellie and her husband knelt for the last time beside her mother's grave. It was like a second parting with that mother. But with Roger as her side, she could not feel altogether friendless or unhappy, and they prayed for a little time in silence, with a calm sense of sadness which had something of heavenly sweetness in it. At last it was time to go, and Roger laid a warning finger upon his young wife's shoulder. She did not say a word, but she bent down once more and kissed her mother's name upon the stone; then she gave her hand to Roger, and they left the churchyard together. While she had been lingering there, Henrietta had landed with Ormiston at the pier to bid her a last adieu. The quick eye of the English girl instantly perceived the goodly company of recruits assembled near the tower, and with a smile of malicious triumph she pointed them out to her companion. Ormiston shook his head reprovingly. He was too thoroughly a soldier not to lament the policy which drafted large bodies of men into foreign armies; but he was full at that moment of his own concerns, and had little inclination to waste time in discussing the wisdom of his leaders.—The truth was, Henrietta's reception of him on his arrival from Dublin the night before had disappointed him. He had come in obedience to her own written orders, as conveyed to him by Nellie, and instead of the frank, loving meeting which his own frank and loving nature had anticipated, he had found her shy, cold, and he was forced to confess to himself, almost unkind. At first he consoled himself by attributing this in a great measure to the presence of her father, before whom she always seemed naturally to assume the bearing of a spoiled and unruly child; but when at her own invitation he had rowed her that morning to Clare Island, and her manner, instead of softening, as he had hoped grew even colder and more constrained than it had been before, he became seriously distressed, and, unable to endure the suspense any longer, they had hardly landed from the boat ere he turned short round upon her, and said:

'Henrietta, before you move one step further you must answer me this question, Are we in future to be friends or foes?'

'Not foes! Oh, certainly not foes!' Henrietta stammered, taken quite aback by the suddenness of the question. 'Oh, certainly not foes!'

'Because I cannot endure this uncertainty much longer,' he went on, as if he had not heard her. 'I must have an answer, and that soon. I might, indeed, insist upon your own letter, but I will not. It was written under a sudden impulse, and the word that gives you to me for a wife must be said with a calm consciousness of its import. What shall that word be, Henrietta—yes or no?'

'Yes, if you will have me,' she said in a low voice, half-turning away her head as she did so.

'If! So long and so faithfully as I have loved you, and do you still talk of if?' he answered almost reproachfully.

'There is an "if," however,' said Henrietta; 'and when you have heard me out, you will have to decide the question for yourself.'

'Nay, the only "if" for me is the "if" that you really love me,' he replied wistfully, and in a way which showed he felt by no means certain upon that score.

'That is the very thing,' she answered, flushing scarlet. 'Harry, dear Harry, remember that I have never had a mother's care, and promise to be still my friend, even if what I have got to tell you should alter all your other wishes in my regard.'

'What can you have to say that could do that?' he asked impatiently. 'For God's sake, Henrietta, say it out at once, whatever it may be!'

'It is not so very easy, perhaps,' she said in a low voice, and then she added quickly, 'They call me a woman grown, Harry, and yet to some few things I think that I am still almost a child.'

'In a great many things rather, I should say, he could not resist saying, with a smile.

That smile reassured her, and she went on quickly: 'You know that it has never been a new thing to me to consider myself your wife, Harry. My father has treated me from childhood as your affianced bride, and we have played at being wedded in the nursery. You cannot