



DOCTOR AINLEY'S TWO HOLIDAY'S.

BY RUTH LAMB.
(Conclusion.)

An urgent case occupied the early evening hours, and it was later than he intended it to be before he turned his steps towards South Street. It was a narrow side street off a wide thoroughfare, and as he approached he noticed a carriage standing opposite to it. At first he thought it must be that of another medical man, but a closer look at the vehicle convinced him that it was not.

"It is waiting for Miss Walker's young lady. Shall I go in?" was the second thought, as he walked slowly towards the door of the little house which held his patient.

Before Dr. Ainley reached it Mrs. Warde came out.

"Oh! doctor, I am glad you have come," she said, "I was going to seek you. My father is worse, and she has been asking for you. Miss Gladys is with her."

There was no time for ceremony, and he followed Mrs. Warde into the room at once.

Miss Walker's head was resting within the encircling arm of a girl whose sweet face was full of tender sympathy as she looked on that of the dying woman. She was repeating the twenty-third psalm in a low but clear voice, and it was hard to tell from the expression of the two faces, whether speaker or listener found the words most precious.

Miss Walker's lips moved in vision as the last words of glad confidence, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever," brought the psalm to an end. Then Dr. Ainley stepped gently forward into sight.

"How happy I am! I have all I wished for. Miss Gladys, this is the gentleman I told you about. He and kind Mrs. Warde have been so good to me. I should like to say good-bye to you all now."

The old landlady drew near and kissed the wan face, but could not speak for weeping. Dr. Ainley, deeply moved, saw the fair girl clasp the dying woman in a tender embrace, but in place of tears and sobs she answered the look from those wonderful eyes with one of hope and joy.

"I will be down now. Thank you, dear Miss Gladys," said Miss Walker, as the girl laid her head on the pillow. "God will repay, though I can only give words of thanks for all your goodness."

She held out her trembling hand to the doctor. He took it in both his, and, bending forward, kissed her forehead.

A lovely smile overspread her face as she said—

"It is like having brother, sister, mother, to have three about my bed, and I once thought I might be alone." The sentence was not finished. Instead came the words, "Doctor, promise me you will go for a holiday as soon as—you know."

"I will—I understand," was the answer.

"Now pray wish me once more."

Fergus Ainley had often knelt by that bedside, and he at once complied with the request. He held one thin hand in a tender clasp, Miss Gladys the other, and at times Miss Walker's trembling left joined in the solemn words of prayer offered on her behalf. Then the last whisper ceased, and they knew that all was over.

The old landlady broke into a paroxysm of lamentation, but Miss Gladys soothed her with words of sympathy, and reminded her that a life of suffering had been ended, and one of loved ones begun.

"I am so sorry to lose her myself," she said, "but I cannot weep for her; she was so happy at the thought of going."

"Where the wicked cease from troubling, And the weary are at rest."

Then, turning to Dr. Ainley, the girl said, "Let me thank you for your goodness to my poor friend. Here was a lovely nature, well worth knowing, though, I fear, few knew this."

I owe much to her—far more than she ever had to thank me for. Her sweet patient life has taught me many lessons. I deeply regret that I was so far away during most of the serious part of her illness, but I could not help it."

"It was a great pleasure to her to speak of you and to receive your letters," said the doctor. "Your return gave her what she most longed for. I was indeed glad when I heard of it."

"Quite contrary to what we had planned. My father and I found ourselves on our homeward way ten days sooner than we expected or intended. We thought an adverse circumstance had sent us. I know now that it was by the good providence of God I was brought home just in time. I have a little trust to discharge before I go. May I speak to you now? Or, if you will kindly go with me to the carriage, I can speak there for a moment," added she, noticing that Mrs. Warde was listening eagerly.

The doctor complied, and having taken a last look at the placid face of the dead, and said a few words to the landlady, Miss Gladys left the house. When seated in the carriage, the girl drew a little sealed packet from her pocket and placed it in the doctor's hand.

"She asked me to give you this, and to remind you on no account to forget your last promise to her. She felt quite sure you would make it, even before she spoke to you. I shall come to the house to-morrow to know what arrangements have been made. I think poor Alice has left very definite instructions."

Dr. Ainley thanked her, put the little packet into his pocket, took the hand she offered, and bade her good night, then closed the door, and in a moment Miss Gladys was gone.

Dr. Ainley returned to the house and found two kindly neighbours with Mrs. Warde.

"I know nothing of Miss Walker's affairs," he said, "but I will be responsible for all expenses in case of need."

"There is no occasion, sir. The poor dear arranged everything beforehand, and I expect Miss Gladys has given you a letter telling all about it. I was with her when she put it in the young lady's hand for you. My lodger never owed me a penny beyond the week; she settled every Saturday evening as regular as the time came. She was very good to me at the last, beside the paying in a business way. You may trust us to do what is right now," added Mrs. Warde.

"I am sure of it," said Dr. Ainley. "I will read my letter, and will see you again in the morning."

When he reached home he opened the packet, and found within a letter, written in pencil, and a second envelope sealed like the first, on which were the words: "Please read the letter before you open this."

Dr. Ainley did so, and it was no shame to his manhood to tell that more than once while reading, his eyes became moist and dim. It began—

"DEAR DOCTOR,—I want these few lines to thank you, once again, for all your goodness to me. What you have done to cheer and lighten my last days only I can know. You came to me, a worn-out worker, lonely and cast aside, if not quite forgotten by all for whom I had wrought my best, during past years. You thought I had very little money, and you would not lessen that little by receiving anything at my hands. All the same, you tended me with all the skill and care you could have given to the greatest in the land, and you came to my poor room bringing every outside comfort you could think of."

"You did far more. You cheered many a lonely hour; you put me in mind of God's unflinching love; you read to me the words of promise; you restored my faith in human kind. For, doctor, it was a sore trial to me

that scarcely any of my late employers troubled even to ask after me, who had I gone in and out of their homes for years. My work came with my night, and in which I had taken such pride and pleasure, had brought me no nearer to them than as if I were a mere sewing machine of wood and steel. I loved the little children; so, doctor—for I had a woman's heart beating within me; and I could not altogether help envying happy mothers who were used to have little arms clinging round their necks, and little feet cattering to meet them when they came in sight. Such happiness was not for me; but I used to take double delight in making the little garments beautiful which were to cover the children."

"But the mothers never guessed what love went with every stitch, and never dreamed that the money they paid me for the day's work was often the least part of my wages. The sight of the happy-faced child charmed with the new frock I had made, and a kiss from the rosy lips, meant more than the money; though I needed it too, for most such workers do want their wages. The children have most likely forgotten me. What wonder when the mothers have put another machine in my place, and have not asked if I were living or dead!"

"You came to heal my nearly worn-out frame if you could; but that was beyond human power. You did bring calm to a wounded mind, and a dying woman prays that you may be equal in kind a hundredfold."

"I am not so poor as you have always thought me. Many years ago a legacy of £300 came to me. I kept it close, added the interest to it, and now it is nearly doubled. Out of the amount I have placed £150 in Miss Gladys' hands for Mrs. Warde's benefit. My funeral expenses and other little matters she knows about are fully provided for. My dear young lady would have nothing but the poor seamstress's silver thimble, in remembrance of me and my work."

"The rest of the money is in the enclosed envelope, and I pray you to accept it, and for my sake use a portion at once in taking the good holiday and rest which you have lately deferred for my sake. You will take it only from me, for no human being has a claim on a penny through relationship, or friendship. I wish it were thousands. Take what there is, dear doctor, not in payment of anything you have done, but as a token of gratitude and esteem from

"ALICE WALKER."

Inside the envelope were crisp new Bank of England notes worth £300. It was evident that the writer had realised her little property in order that it might be given straight into the hands of those she wished to benefit.

Three days later Alice Walker was laid to rest in a beautiful spot chosen by Miss Gladys. The three who had soothed her last hours were the only mourners; and went together, but the young girl's carriage awaited her, and she returned home alone. Dr. Ainley had previously given her the letter to read, and told her what the packet contained.

"I am sure all has been well and wisely done," she said. "Alice knew that the little she had to give, if placed in your hands, would be worthily applied. She had known by experience how Dr. Ainley ministered to her poor patients, and doubtless wished to share in his good work in a manner. But you will comply with her last request, will you not?"

"I will. Did I not promise? Beside, I am grateful for the opportunity afforded me. I am a poor man still, and not ashamed to owe something to the warm-hearted woman whom I shall sorely miss; though I shall act as her almoner in disposing of most of her gift. Thank you for judging me so kindly and truly."