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**LINKED LIVES.**

By Lady Gertrude Douglas.

**CHAPTER XXXII.**

TOO LATE.

"Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!  
Late, late, so late! but we can enter still!  
Too late!—too late!  
Ye cannot enter now!"

—TENNISON.

Some of my readers are probably acquainted with that part of the old town which is called, in Edinburgh, the Cowgate, and they will bear me out in my statement that it is one of the most wretched, as well as one of the poorest of city districts. I feel certain, however, that the majority of those who peruse this story can form but a faint idea of the miserable dwellings in this locality, whose very existence is a disgrace to this soi-disant enlightened nineteenth century, and it is for their benefit that I am about to briefly describe the Cowgate, towards which Mabel and Katie, on leaving Carlton Terrace, directed their steps in the golden sunlight of that July evening, which is destined to be a turning-point in the lives of both.

The Cowgate consists of a long, close, dirty street, in some parts so narrow that opposite neighbors could almost shake hands with each other out of their respective windows—if, by the way, those miserable apertures, stuffed with straw, rags, rarely enough with broken panes of glass, can rightly be termed windows. Such as they are, they nevertheless furnish all the access for light or air to the dwellings within, and through them the sun darts a few cheering rays, aslant long lines of cord or twine, which, fastened across from window to window, on the upper stories, are substituted for a drying-ground by the poverty-stricken inmates, and on which hang their scanty garments when taken from the wash-tub.

They have no other resource. What, then, can they do but further diminish their chance of sunlight and fresh air by thus turning to account the only unrented space allowed them, poor creatures? I know nothing more depressing than, on a fine summer day, to pass down that street, under the melancholy canopy of ragged shirts, tawdry short-gowns, half-washed linen, tattered dresses, and other garments, which almost shut out the blue sky, created by God alike for the enjoyment of rich and poor.

There are no shops worth naming in this street, though bread, and the cheapest and worst groceries, can be purchased in one or two tumble-down, dirty rooms. I mean, of course, with the exception of whiskey-houses and pawn-shops. These, at least, drive in the Cowgate a flourishing trade, and are very numerous.

As for the inhabitants!—O God! what perverted specimens of humanity they seem to be! Men, women and children, all alike depraved, as they stand idly lounging around the doors of public houses, brawling, swearing, too often using foul, obscene language, and bearing on their countenances the brand of poverty, the worst, most shameful form of poverty—the poverty that results from drink and gross immorality.

But even yet you cannot conceive the squalid misery of the Cowgate, unless you turn aside with me, out of the main street, into one or other of those side ways and closes, dark and disgusting to behold, where human beings are hideous and repulsive, crowded together like ants in an anthill.

Human life—left to itself—grovelling in the midst of vice, starvation and dirt, surpassing all description! (Great God in Heaven, is there no remedy for so much evil?)

Down into one of these ways, through a low, dark archway, and from thence along a narrow alley (where, gather her petticoats around her tightly as she may, Mabel cannot altogether avoid contact with the slimy wall on either side of her), Katie silently leads the way. She had pushed on in front of Mabel, who, by this time well incensed to unpleasant smells, is quite prepared for the effluvia which meet her at the entrance of the passage.

A group of half-clothed, sickly-looking children are amusing themselves in the alley: the eldest of them, a girl not yet seven years old, has withdrawn a few yards apart from her companions, and crouches in a heap up against the wall, draining the last drops out of her mother's whiskey-bottle, which she has been sent out to refill at the nearest "pub."

"If ye please, mem, cud ye tell us whaur a lassie they ca' Maggie Mackay's bidden?" inquires Katie, stopping at many doors, and repeating the same question several times without obtaining any information. At last, at the far end of the wynd, an untidy, red-headed girl, staring out of an upper window, calls out—

"There's nae sic lassie in the Close. Maybe it's Maggie Anderson ye're wantin'."

"Ay, ay—they'll jist be Maggie. Whaur's the house? Cud ye be sae guid as to direct us til'?" answers Katie, eagerly.

"Gang straucht forret. It's the hoose at the far en' o' yer corner. D'ye see whaur it turns? Ye canna miss yer way."

"Thank ye kindly," replies Katie. "Eh, Miss Mabel," she adds, turning anxiously to Mabel, "will ye let me gang my ain lane? I ken the hoose noo. It's no a fit place for ye, Miss Mabel."

"Never mind, Katie; go on. I am not going to leave you," said Mabel, with decision which Katie knows it will be useless to dispute.

She accordingly walks on, Mabel following; two minutes more bring them to their destination. Whatever character the house bore when Katie last heard of it, it certainly seems empty and deserted now. No amount of knocking elicits any response from within, and after some hesitation Katie tries the door itself. Finding it unlocked, she pushes it wide open.

"Mrs. White, are ye there?" she calls—then pauses to listen.

No answer, only a good deal of loud barking from some imprisoned dogs.

"They'll be out. Maybe the hoose doesna belong till them noo. Maggie, Maggie, are ye there, lassie?"

"Hush! Listen, Katie. Did ye not hear a groan? There—again; it's this room to the right. Try the door."

Katie opens it cautiously and peeps in, but instantly withdraws her head, and half closing the door exclaims,

"Miss Mabel, the stanch is just awfu'! Ye'll no be able to stan' it!"

"Nonsense, Katie! Go in directly." Katie reluctantly obeys. Once more she turns the handle, and pushes the door ajar. Involuntarily Mabel falls back for a brief moment, almost knocked down by the shocking smell emitted from the room. Three or four dogs rush forward, barking and yelping furiously, bent on making their exit through the open doorway, which they accomplish with the exception of one.

"Dinna let them out, for the love of God! He'll blue murder me gin ye let the wee doggies out!" moans forth a weak voice from a dark corner of the room.

Merely on us, they are gone?—all but this one! What shall we do, Katie?" says Mabel, in a bewildered tone.

"Hoot, let them gang, Miss Mabel—dinna heed them, they're a' stolen. I doot the room would do better wantin' them. O Lord, wull ye be Maggie?"

exclaims Katie, staring with a frightened gaze at a spectral apparition in the corner, which, owing to the gloom pervading the apartment, neither she nor Mabel had been able at first to distinguish.

They can see it now—every moment more plainly. A horrible sight it is!—One that makes their blood run cold, and that is likely to haunt their memory for many a long day to come. An emaciated woman lies, or rather crouches, upon a heap of dirty straw; she is almost entirely without clothing, for the strip of torn blanket thrown across her feet, and the ragged remnants of a plaid shawl cast around her shoulders, are quite insufficient to conceal the skeleton of skin and bone to which she is reduced. Besides the shawl and blanket, she has no covering. A wild fever glare burns in her sunken eyes; her black hair hangs matted round her ghastly face, giving her the appearance of a savage rather than of a civilized being. Katie nevertheless recognizes her at once.

"Maggie!" she ejaculates, an overwhelming rush of pity driving forever all hatred from her heart.

"Ay, ay, noo's yer time, Katie Mackay! Ye cudna' lat me dee in peace; ye maun hae yer revenge; ye maun curse me—"

"Eh, Maggie, whist ye!—haud yer tongue! It's no to reproach ye we've come the night!" cries Katie, flinging herself down on the floor beside her sister; and taking off her own shawl she wraps it round Maggie's shrunken form.

"Is any doctor attending you?" inquires Mabel, anxiously—"is there no one here to take care of you?"

"Doctor!—'deed no. What sudger the doctor atten' sic as me? I dinna want doctors."

"Eh, Maggie, ye're awfu' sick—what ails ye? Whaur ha ye been hidin' sae lang? What's this ye're livin' wi'?" asks Katie rapidly, making one question succeed another in her excitement.

"Ye needna come speirin' efter me," responds Maggie, suspiciously. "Ye can jist min' yer ain affairs. I'll be deid soon an' out o' yer way."

"Katie," interrupts Mabel; "she is dyin' fast—go, fetch one of the priests. I will stay with her and try what I can do."

"Och! dinna fash yersel'! Nae priests for me!" groans Maggie, falling backwards exhausted upon her pallet—"I's gaein' to hell, it's owre late for repentance!"

"Katie, Katie!" implores Mabel again, for Katie hesitates. She is very unwilling to leave Mabel all alone in so doubtful a locality. She shrewdly suspects that Maggie must have taken up with some thief—probably a dog-stealer. What if during her absence he should return and find Mabel there, alone? No wonder Katie hesitates; but Mabel overrules all her misgivings. "Katie, ye must go. Send one of the children outside for the doctor; but go yourself for the priest. Take a fly, child!—run!—be quick! If I am not mistaken, this is turning into brain-fever. She will be past all help soon. See, here's my purse—Bring some lemons with you, to make her a cooling drink; and call at the hoose for some linen, and anything else you can think of to be useful on your way. Now go; you have not a moment to lose."

Katie hesitates no longer; a volley of excited orders from her dying sister reminds her that hell must indeed be repining beneath her feet. At all risks Maggie's soul must be first consigned; so off darts Katie, leaving Mabel alone with the raving woman.

At the mouth of the wynd Katie encounters Jeanie Kerr, who at any other time is the last person she would wish to have seen near Mabel. In her present distress of mind, however, even Jeanie's presence seems to

Katie a preferable evil to utter solitude in that lonely hoose for Mabel. She accordingly entreats Jeanie to go on, and remain there until her return, which Jeanie good-naturedly enough promises to do, thereby relieving Katie's mind of a great burden.

Meanwhile Mabel, left with Maggie, proceeds, in the first place, to look about the hoose for some cold water. After some trouble, she discovers a large stone pitcher (not in Maggie's room, but in one of the others); it is about half full of water—not very fresh, certainly, but better than nothing; so Mabel pours some of it into a broken cup, the only one she can find in any of the cupboards, and adding thereto a few drops of aromatic vinegar, which she has brought in her bag, she applies herself to bathing Maggie's scorching brow and temples with the refreshing lotion.

"Wha's you?" asks the wretched woman, opening her eyes; for, after her conversation with Katie, she had relapsed into a heavy stupor.

"Don't be frightened," whispers Mabel, soothingly—"it's a friend."

"I's gaein' to hell!" responds Maggie, with frightful composure.

"Oh, hush, hush!—poor Maggie, don't say that. God will forgive you, if you will only turn to Him even now."

"I's gaein' to the deevil! Och, I'll be gey hot in hell this weather, I'm thinkin'!" pursues Maggie, with a bitter laugh; then suddenly checking herself she stares hard at Mabel. "Whaur's Katie?" she inquires. "She needna fash hersel' to bring the police to me; the deevil wull hae me afore they come."

"Katie is gone to fetch some things to make you comfortable; she is not gone for the police," says Mabel, laying her cool hand upon Maggie's burning fingers.

"I dinna ken wha ye'll be," resumes Maggie, in a low, stifled voice; "but gin ye'll haud yer heid doon a wee, I'll lippen something til ye ye'll maybe glad to hear. I maun say't oot afore I dee, ye ken."

"Say it to the priest, then, when he comes; if it's any sin, Maggie, I can't give you absolution sae he can."

Maggie answers by an oath which makes Mabel shiver. Before she has time to add another word the door opens, and Jeanie enters, somewhat fearfully, for she has a great dread of death, and she knows that Maggie cannot be far from it. Whatever it is that Maggie has to say, she becomes suddenly dumb as soon as she perceives Jeanie. She grows, too, within the next half-hour considerably worse.

The priest has finished reading, when he looks at her, now cursing; at one moment daring Heaven to do its worst, again shuddering, and screaming till the devils to spare her. Jeanie, terrified out of her senses, retires into the most distant corner of the room; while Mabel, down upon her knees beside the sufferer, tries to cool her fevered lips with cold water, bathes her brow, her face, her hands, striving her utmost to alleviate her bodily torments, while with solemn, soothing words she seeks to point the poor soul to the foot of the cross.

But all in vain! It is, to use Maggie's own words, repeated at least a hundred times during that awful night, "owre late, owre late!" The hour of grace has passed for her; she cannot, and she will not repent; she will not even listen to Mabel's assurances of pardon being yet possible, but calls out in mad despair that for her all hope is over.

Sick at heart, and discouraged at last, Mabel leaves her for a few moments, and goes over to where Jeanie, pale and terrified, is crouching. From her she learns something of Maggie's present circumstances. She had only recently returned to Edinburgh, in company with a man called Joe Anderson. She had but lately recovered from gastric fever, and had been for some weeks in a hospital in England.

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Edinburgh; she had returned only during the last week, and missing Maggie from her usual place of resort, had gone in search of her. She had discovered her that very morning. Maggie told her she had been ill for several days, and that no one had made her any visits. Joe Anderson had not made his appearance since last Saturday night—he was locked up, Jeanie surmised—and as no one just then inhabited the hoose where Maggie was lodgin', no one had noticed her disappearance.

By and by Katie comes back; the parish doctor follows almost immediately, and the priest is not far behind him. The doctor, after a rapid but careful examination of his patient, pronounces the case hopeless. The fever is not contagious.

"But," adds the doctor, "the girl has been completely prostrated with gastric fever; some sudden excitement has brought on this attack on the brain; she is quite past recovery."

Katie bursts into tears, while Mabel, almost paralysed with horror, finds voice to inquire—

"How long? Will she be conscious again?"

"She cannot last long. She will probably go about the turn of the night. She may have a lucid interval, but she is more likely to go off in a fit of frenzy. I suspect drink has a good deal to do with this," says the doctor, shaking his head.

"The doctor has done his part; he has stood for half an hour applying leech bandages to the fevered head. With difficulty, too, he has succeeded in administering some medicine, but he is evidently hopeless as to the result. After awhile he goes away, promising to return early next morning, by Minard's Liniment cures Burns.

which time, however, he thinks all will be over.

The priest, too, can do but little for the dying woman, who cannot now be made even conscious of his presence. He remains, however, lest he should be wanted later, and meanwhile solemnly begins the prayers for the Atoning, in which Mabel and even poor Katie join.

The evening wears on; the long twilight has changed into darkness. Some neighbor has brought a candle. There is no table in the room whereon it can be placed, so Mabel beckons Jeanie forward, and gives it her to hold.

Very unwillingly Jeanie advances to the bed. She cannot bear the sight of Maggie's distorted face, and she turns her head in terror, so as to shut out the ghastly spectacle from her eyes.

The mad raving gradually abates. A little before 9 o'clock there comes a sharp rasping sound in Maggie's throat, after which the unhappy girl draws her breath more slowly with deep, gasping groans, that are very harrowing to the ear.

"O God! is there no hope?" murmurs Mabel. "Is this the dreadful end of this dreadful life?"

Yes, the end!—it has come at length for Maggie; as, sooner or later, it must come for every child of mortality.

O children of poverty, children of misfortune, can you not take to heart this lesson? Life is very short, it has but one ending, and that is death. It is all over now for Maggie. Her thirty-four years are gone for ever. Recklessly she has sold her soul to the devil, and the devil has come to claim his own! She has taken her fill of such sinful pleasures as came in her way; she has madly cast from her all love and practice of virtue; she has trampled upon every opportunity of grace—for Maggie has had opportunities. God is not unjust. He does not seek to reap where He has not sown; but all has been lost on Maggie. She has defied her God when she was young and full of the life He gave her, and now, at the eleventh hour, the final groans of repentance is not vouchsafed to her. Look at her, you who think you can live without God, and remember that, if you live without Him, so must you die!

Nine strikes from a neighboring clock. There is silence in the chamber of death—save for those gasping moans, growing every moment more faint. From the noisy, wicked streets comes the echo of ribald mirth, sometimes of uproarious fighting; but within all is very still.

The priest has finished the prayers, and is now kneeling, saying his Evensong by the light of one miserable candle, still held by Jeanie. Mabel, wearied out, has sunk down upon the floor, where she sits with her head bowed in prayer for the dying girl; while Katie, pale with terror, leans over her sister's bed, anxiously watching for the last sign of returning consciousness.

Ten o'clock. They are still there. A wan, purple hue has begun to spread itself over Maggie's face; her eyes, closed for the last hour, now re-open widely, and stare all round the room.

"Eh, Maggie," whispers Katie, "er ye comin' til' yersel'?" Jist mak' ae guid ae' contrition."

Maggie's features become terribly distorted. She gives a wild spring forward, pointing with glaring eyes to the door.

"Div ye no see him?" she cries; "it's the deevil—he's come to seek me."

Katie sprinkles some holy water over the bed, but Maggie shivers and turns away with horror.

"Dinna! dinna!" she gasps; "it burns! it burns!"

"Eh, Maggie, say a wee prayer til oor Blessit Lord! He wunna misheed ye," pleads poor Katie; but Maggie only laughs wildly, and falls into another fit of frenzy, more terrible than the last. For nearly an hour it requires the joint strength of all present to hold the unfortunate creature in her bed, from which she would throw herself in her despair; and all the while she is cursing in a manner so awful as to blanch with horror every face in the room.

At eleven she again becomes quiet, and sinks into a state of semi-unconsciousness, from which no one expects her to recover. Just as the clock strikes twelve, however, they all become aware that the last change is at hand. Once more Maggie opens her eyes. She is no longer insensible, she is perfectly conscious, and knows what she is saying.

"Katie!" she gasps, seizing her sister's hand, "Katie ye'll sune be rid o' me. I'm gaein' to hell!"

Here the priest interposes, but Maggie motions him peremptorily aside.

"I'm gaein' to hell!" she repeats. "Er ye satisfied noo, Katie Mackay?"

"Eh dear soul, repent ye," sobs Katie. "Dinna speak sic fearsome words! Wull ye no confess yer sins, Maggie? See, I hae brought his reverence to see ye. While there's life there's pardon, ye ken."

"Ay, ay, I do so ken. But it's no pardon I's wantin'—it's owre late, it's owre late. Katie, ye've gotten yer revenge for the bairn's deith. It was me that kilt it!"

"Eh, Maggie, never heed revenge noo! Say ye're sorry. Do say ye're sorry, Maggie, an' ye'll maybe win intil heaven yet."

"It was me that kilt the bairn!" shrieks Maggie, with a final burst of passionate vehemence.

"I aye hatti ye, Katie. Div ye no min' yer nicht in Mistress Logie's hoose? I telt ye ye wad repent yer conduct, an' that maybe 'twad be

better for ye gin ye hadna sae muckle pluck in ye. Weel then, lassie, it's beyon' yer power to haim me noo—ye canna fetch the magistrate to hang me—ha! ha! it's owre late for that, lang wi' a' the rest. Sae there's the truth to ye. It was me that kilt the bairn—I gied it a snell o' chloroform when ye were asleep!" Div ye hear me, lassie?"

"Eh, Maggie, Maggie! Whisht, ye whisht ye, ye ken, an' ye'll be true. God forgie ye. Gin it's the truth ye're speakin', ye war awfu' cruel. But dinna heed ye no. Mind yersel', Maggie; think on yer ain pur soul, lassie."

"My soul is damned! Och! I's no heedin'. Ay, ay, Katie, I's gotten my revenge on ye. Gin ye hadna wakened up sae sudden, maybe the wee bairn wad hae deid afore ye droont it. Ah, ye droont it, ye ken, an' ye thocht it war deid, did ye! Ha, ha! I telt ye I wad hae my revenge ane o' these days! What for did they no hang ye, Katie? I was that mad they didna hang ye. Och! curse ye a! It's to hell ye gaein'!"

Like a candle flaring in its socket ere it finally expires, Maggie, while raving forth her last terrible speech, starts from her reclining posture.

With clenched fists she tries to strike out at her sister, but in the act of so doing falls back, with a frightful groan. There follows a gurgling sound in her throat, and with an oath which she has no longer power to utter trembling on her lips, Maggie goes forth out of life into the presence of the God she has defied—goes forth to judgment, from which there is no escape and no return.

TO BE CONTINUED.

**The Laity and the Bible.**

Some of our Protestant neighbors are disturbed because the Pope, in his recent letter on the Bible, appeared to urge only clerics to make a clerical study of the Sacred Scriptures, and they complain because he did not encourage the laity also to search Holy Writ. One thing at a time. It is the business of the clergy to know the Word of God, and it is their duty to defend it from the attacks of heretic or infidel—how can they fulfill these functions unless they explore the whole field of text, oriental languages, interperetation, variations, commentaries, and modern criticism? Besides, they can make no advance and put the proof in print, without benefit to the laity. Moreover, Pope after Pope has already recommended the faithful to read the two testaments. And our own Bishops, at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, wrote: "It can hardly be necessary for us to remind you, beloved brethren, that the most highly-valued treasure of every family library, and the most frequently and lovingly made use of, should be the Holy Scriptures." Need the Pope paint the lily or refine gold that is already pure? The people have always been taught by the Church to treasure the Bible, and at every Mass they have heard extracts from it read. Many of them know its most edifying chapters by heart, and all of them know, or at least it is the effort of the Church that they should know, all of it that is necessary for salvation.

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