

returns to him—for it is the face of one who has made up her mind to walk over burning ploughshares, even though they be sevenfold heated.

"I have thought of something to do," she says, "a way in which I will try to help you. I may fail—I cannot tell—do not hope, but if you know how to pray, pray for me. Now go, and come back to-morrow morning—as early as you like."

Even the selfish nature before her is roused by the white resolution of her face to an instinctive fear.

"Kate," he says, "what are you going to do? I do not want you to—to make any sacrifice for me. I am worthless and useless in the world—better let me go and blow out my brains."

"If we only made sacrifices for those who deserve them, there would not be much merit in them," she says, with a wan smile. "But I do not think of you only—I think of those who deserve everything from me. Go—and do not blow out your brains. I may have good news for you to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"If this long, fearful strife
Was but the work of hours,
What would be years of life?
Why did a cruel Heaven
For such great suffering call?
And why—oh, still more cruel!
Must her own words do all?"

Kate gives herself no time to waver in her resolution. There is no one whose advice she can ask, there is no one whose sympathy she can claim. She must depend on her own judgment, and do in her own strength all that is to be done. After Randal's departure she goes to her room and puts on her hat, looking with a sense of strangeness at the pale, set face which the mirror gives back, and wondering again if it is not all a hideous dream, from which she will presently awake. "Can it be possible that I, Kate Lawrence, am going to ask Mr. Ashton for money?" she says to herself. A day—nay, even an hour before—such a thing would have seemed to her beyond the wildest range of possibility. No personal need which humanity knows would induce her to make such an appeal for herself—but there are many of us who have done for others what we would have walked through a furnace sooner than have done for ourselves. To Kate it seems that life can never hold a more bitter cup to her lips than this which she must drain to-day; but, bitter though it be, she does not falter. "I have often said that there is not anything I would not do for them," she thinks, "and now the time has come to prove that I meant what I said."

She leaves the house without seeing any one—for Fenwick has gone out, and Miss Brooke is nursing her disappointment in the seclusion of her own apartment—and takes her way to the hotel where Mr. Ashton is staying. It is a considerable walk, but she wishes that it could be lengthened ten times when at last she finds herself at her destination, and a servant has taken her card. Fortunately the parlor into which she is shown is empty, and she sits down, saying to her sick, faint heart: "Courage!—it will be over soon!"

There is scant comfort, however, in such a thought as this. We can suffer—ah, what can we not suffer, even in the space of a minute! The fable of the eastern prince who lived a long life in the moment of plunging his head under water is but an allegory of a truth which most of us have experienced. "We live in feelings, not in figures on a dial," and a minute, which is long enough to send a soul into eternity, is long enough, also, to break a heart or ruin a life.

Her time of waiting—which in reality is not long—seems to Kate interminable, yet she would not abridge it by an instant, if she could, and words are altogether inadequate to express her sensations when Mr. Ashton finally enters the room, and she knows that her hour is come.

"This is a very unexpected pleasure, my dear Kate," he says, with the courtesy which, like winter sunshine, has no warmth in it. "I had not expected to see you again before my departure, since I leave to-night."

"I am glad I am not too late to find you," says Kate, struggling with an overmastering temptation to say anything—a dozen conventional falsehoods occur to her—except the truth, to account for her presence. But conscious of her own weakness, and conscious, also, that Miss Vaughn or her mother may come in at any moment, she plunges headlong into her subject, in order to bar the door of retreat on herself.

"I have come," Uncle Ashton," she says, "on what you may think a very singular errand—to ask my first favor of you."

"Indeed!" says Mr. Ashton. This beginning does not so much startle as its directness amuses him. What the favor is, he has not the remotest idea, nor does he care; but he has been pleased from the first with Kate, and he is pleased now. Kate, who has gone through life winning hearts on all sides, has never tested her power of attraction so thoroughly as on this animated iceberg. To say that she has won his heart would be incorrect—since it is exceedingly doubtful whether he has a heart to win; but she has won his admiration and pleased his taste, and beyond that point it is not possible for any one to go.

"I shall be happy to serve you if it is in my power to do so," says the man of the world, courteously yet cautiously, as he looks with approval at the fair face and the fearless eye.

"It is in your power if you will," says Kate. "O Uncle Ashton, do you not like to be generous!—do you not want to do good? It seems to me that one would only care for money—a great deal of money—in order to help and benefit others."

"It seems so to you, does it?" says Mr. Ashton, with a dry smile. He has not anticipated a demand on his purse, and he stiffens a little as is the usual wont of human nature when called upon to exercise benevolence. "Allow me to remark that you do not know a great deal about the matter," he goes on. "But—though I make no pretensions to philanthropy—I rarely refuse to give, in measure, to charitable undertakings, and I presume it is something of the kind in which you are interested."

"Yes, it is certainly charitable," says Kate, drawing a deep breath. The word cuts her like a whip as she utters it, for she thinks of those at Fairfields, who have always held their heads so high in honest pride—and now she is asking charity for them! How can she do it? For one moment—the last—she feels as if she cannot, let the alternative be what it may; but then strength comes to her "that equals her desire," she looks at Mr. Ashton with a light of resolution in her eyes.

"It is not for any charitable undertaking," she says, more like a princess than a suppliant, "it is for myself that I have come to ask your bounty. Uncle Ashton, will you give me twelve thousand dollars?"

If she had lifted her parasol and knocked Mr. Ashton down, she could not have amazed him more utterly than by this request, unequalled, it seems to him, for audacity and coolness. He is noted among all who know him for retaining self-possession and the power of speech in all emergencies, but for once the latter absolutely fails him. He gazes at Kate, like one who cannot trust the evidence of his ears, and ejaculates: "What!"

"Twelve thousand dollars," says the girl, with a flush rising into her hitherto pale cheeks. "It seems a large sum to me, but it is not a large sum to you; is it? Every one says that you are very rich. I never thought of your riches before, but now I hope, oh, I hope very much, that you will do this for me!"

"I am not a Rothschild by any means, young lady," says Mr. Ashton, recovering somewhat from his amazement, or at least from the effects of his amazement. "Twelve thousand dollars is not a *bagatelle*, even to me; and you will allow me to ask you what you want with it."

"That I cannot tell you," says Kate, clasping her hands tightly together; "but I want it. Oh, want is a poor word! I would pour out my blood, I would sell myself into slavery, to get it—and you are my only hope! Uncle Ashton, will you give it to me?—not because I am your niece—I make no claim on that ground—but because I am a human creature in need and pain!"

"A great many human creatures are in need and pain, whom I feel no obligation to help," replies Mr. Ashton, coolly. "It would be better to base your claim on the ground of being my niece. And this fact gives me a right to inquire into the need of which you speak. It strikes me"—here his keen glance takes in every detail of her appearance—"that you do not look like one who stands in need of pecuniary assistance—unless, indeed, you are in debt."

"I in debt!" says Kate. "I would sooner suffer anything than owe a farthing which I could not pay. For myself, I need nothing; I have the kindest, the most generous friends in the world; but for others—"

"Ah, now we come to it!" says Mr. Ashton, as he pauses abruptly. "So it is not for yourself, but for others, that you want twelve thousand dollars? My dear niece, however willing I might be to oblige you, do you not think that it is asking a little too much to expect me to give such a sum in the dark to some unknown person or persons?"

"But I ask you to give it to me," says Kate, imploringly. "Surely it is my affair to whom I choose to give it! Oh, Uncle Ashton you ought to know that only the most terrible necessity would make me come to you with such a request! Is there nothing I can say, is there nothing I can do, to move you?"

Passionate eyes, passionate voice, passionate quivering lips—Mr. Ashton reads them all as he might read the open pages of a book, and says to himself: "She wants it for her lover; no woman would plead so for any one else."

Acting on this opinion, he says aloud, in his most caustic tone: "You leave me no alternative but to say that I am not too dull to guess for whom you are willing to do so much. Miss Vaughn told me this morning that you had rejected Fenwick in order to engage yourself to that reckless spendthrift, Frank Tarleton. Confess that it is for him you want the money."

He sends his arrow home triumphantly, as one who, confident in his own sagacity, expects to see shame and confusion follow. But it is neither shame nor confusion which flashes upon him from Kate's eloquent countenance. Her face blossoms into color like an opening rose, her eyes expand with a full-orb glow such as he has never seen in them before, and she lifts her head as proudly as a queen.

"So that is all you know of me, or of him!" she says. "Do you think I would come to you, or to any other man upon earth, to ask such a favor for Frank Tarleton? Ah, how little you know! how little you know! He would go into beggary, and I would follow him, before he would permit, or I would wrong him by doing

such a thing! No; you may rest satisfied, if you give me this money, that not a dollar of it will ever, directly or indirectly, pass into his possession."

"Humph!" says Mr. Ashton, completely baffled and at sea in his conjectures. It might be very readily possible to doubt the assertions of some people, but he is wise enough to recognize the fact that Kate's are not to be doubted. Consequently he is puzzled as well as baffled. What can he think of a girl who passionately declares that she is ready to make any sacrifice to obtain a sum of money which she does not want for herself or for her lover? The puzzle begins to interest the man who has not had a great deal to interest him in his life, who knows exceedingly little of the unselfish side of human nature, and has hitherto been decidedly incredulous of the existence of such a side. There is a minute's silence, while he debates with himself whether or not he shall make an experiment—a rather costly experiment, it is true, but one which may repay him in the end. Kate is aware that her fate is trembling in the balance, but she does not utter a word further, and, after some time, it is Mr. Ashton who speaks:

"The matter stands in this way, then: You wish me to give you twelve thousand dollars for the benefit of some person to me unknown, and you are willing to pledge yourself—did I not so understand you?—to do in return anything that I may require?"

Though the girl hardly expected this Shylock-like construction of her words, she does not flinch. The proud, delicate face looks at him calmly, the eyes are as brave and steady as ever.

"Yes," she answers; "you understand right. Nothing which is honorable is too heavy a price to pay for this which I need. I pledge myself to do whatever you require, if you will give it to me."

He looks at her curiously, deciding as he looks that the experiment is worth making. He will test her thoroughly—as thoroughly as a woman can be tested—and, if she stands the test, he will acknowledge (to himself) that women are sometimes made for other uses, and capable of higher ends, than he has hitherto imagined.

"I will do you two favors, then, my dear," he says, calmly, "though you will probably not thank me for the second. I will write you a cheque for twelve thousand dollars, and make no inquiry with regard to your disposition of the money, if you will agree to resign your engagement, or love-affair, or whatever it may be called, with Tarleton, and accompany me when I go to Europe."

Dead silence for a minute. Then the girl looks at him, and says in a voice utterly unlike her own: "Do you mean it?—do you really mean it?"

"I mean it, emphatically," he answers. "You are going to wreck your life as your mother wrecked hers before you; and, though I failed to save her, I find, oddly enough, that I should like to save you. There is no need to speak"—as her lips unclose—"I know all that you would say; I have heard the sentiments of an infatuated passion before. If you choose to ruin your life, go and do it—we will shake hands and say farewell here and now; but, if you want the assistance for which you have asked me, I can only give it on the condition that you resign Tarleton and come with me."

No need to ask again if he really means this ultimatum. Kate reads his face as a criminal might read the face of a judge who has power to doom or reprieve, and sees in every line that this decision is final. The supreme hour of her life has come. She is face to face with a necessity of choice such as the bravest might shrink from, and with which few souls, even in this hard and cruel world, are confronted.

For a moment she sits motionless—stunned by the magnitude of the renunciation demanded of her—then she rises and walks away, as she walked away from Randal, to ask herself what she could do to avert disgrace from those she loves. Now it is a sterner question which fate puts before her. In her hands lie the means to save them—but at what a price! She must place on the altar of sacrifice all that gives value to the barren husk of existence; she must put away the love which only a little while ago came back to gladden her heart; she must say farewell to the life which stretches before her like a dream of paradise—a life lighted by hope and blessed by love; above all, she must inflict pain and disappointment on the man who has been true to her through absence and alienation. Is she strong enough for this? Does not the yearning heart, the passionate human nature, cry out: "It is too much!—too much!"

Yes, they cry out with exceeding bitterness—with an appeal which words can as little embody as art can paint the tumult of Nature's fiercest tempest—but the soul rises up and says: "If it must be done, I can do it." That there is no other alternative, she sees plainly. Before her she seems to see Tarleton, with outstretched arms and eager eyes, as she saw him last. If she goes to him, there will be no one in the world to cry shame upon her—but what are all the voices in the world to the voice within one's self? Can love, and tenderness, and happy days, ever sweeten the thought that she, who might have averted, instead, suffered disgrace to fall upon the heads of her tried and faithful friends?

The struggle is short, as we measure time, but it is sharp and bitter as death—as death which comes to tear away the happy, not as death which comes to release the sorrowful.

And, indeed, the comparison is very poor, for one does not inflict death upon one's self, nor do we clearly know what follows after—but in her own hand Kate holds the knife which must cut away the better part of her, and she knows, well she knows, what will follow, what weary days when she will be sick of the sun, what nights of sleepless misery. In all the dreary aftertime, she can never think: "I did not know how terrible it would be! I did not fairly count the cost!"—for she realizes the future as clearly now as she will realize it when it becomes the present, and she counts the cost to the uttermost fraction.

Mr. Ashton, who has been watching her with the calm curiosity with which a scientist would watch the agonies of an animal undergoing vivisection, is, despite himself, almost moved to compassion by the suffering written on every line of the rigid young face, which presently turns to look into his.

"You have a right to make your own terms," she says, "and I accept them. Give me the cheque, and I will do all that you require."

(To be continued.)

ECHOES FROM PARIS.

HER Royal Highness the Countess de Paris has quite recovered from her recent confinement.

THE Russian colony has received an accession, the most agreeable to the Paris world fashion, in the arrival of the Princess Troubetzkof and Princess Alexandra.

THE Parisian actors have opened a clubhouse, intended to imitate the London Garrick, at 34, Rue de Provence. It is called "Le Cercle des Artistes Dramatiques."

M. DE TRIGOFF, the theatrical critic, writes of the marriage of Sara Bernhardt:—"She has lived a wandering, lonely life, but there will in future be no *désert de Sarah*."

It is no longer considered in good taste in Paris to have costly toys or knick-knacks as favours for the cotillion. Flowers, knots of ribbons, rosettes of crêpe and tinsel, and such intrinsically worthless objects, are alone employed.

AT the last winter reception of the Duchess de la Rochefoucauld-Bisaccia, fashion seized the occasion of Lent to display the effect of a surplus of diamonds on the black costume necessary for the penitential time. It was a beautiful sight to see the blaze of gems, and yet strange to think we were indebted for the effect to a religious motive.

It is not true, as reported in some of the English papers, that the highest French military officers think the doubts of the English officers are ill-founded with regard to the proposed tunnel. On the contrary, a French general of great renown, candidly admits to his English friends that he should be dead against the making of the tunnel were he an Englishman.

ANOTHER trouble about the use of a name! M. Rantzau, a resident of Flensburg (Holstein), is on his way to Paris to have his name at once taken off the notice-boards of the Comédie Française. He threatens M. Perrin, the manager, and the authors, MM. Eckmann and Chatrian, with legal proceedings if they refuse to comply with the request.

THE examination of the late census shows that France, despite her dismemberment, the loss of two provinces, still possesses 37,321,000 souls, but each quinquennial muster brings up the deplorable fact that the increase of the population is gradually decreasing. At the present ratio the diminution must soon begin, unless some change should come over the spirit of a people who feel themselves bound to adopt the principles of Malthus.

A FRENCH paper rather sourly tells Sara, in the midst of her honeymoon, that all the world knows that the marriages of the French in a foreign country are not valid in France, therefore Madame Damalas is advised that she would do well when she is in Paris to rearrange her marriage according to French requirements. The reply to this unkind comment is that Madame Damalas is a Dutch woman and her husband a Greek, and they need not therefore conform to French martial law, and both Holland and Greece are satisfied with a marriage legally performed in England.

COUNT BEUST, the Austrian Ambassador, went the other day to the residence of the Minister of Justice. Just as he had reached the door of that great official's cabinet the Count met the wife of the minister, and of course made her a very respectful bow. Eyeing him askance, Madame Cazot asked him what he wanted. "I wish to speak with the Minister, Madame." At that Madame Cazot half opened the door of the cabinet and called out, "Here, Jules, a man wants to speak to you." Poor Count! The blow in his face and the overthrow of his diplomatic placidity may be imagined at hearing himself called "a man." The explanation was an awkward one on all sides.