

aloud to Una that she was his only life, and he must win her to his heart or die; and then the resemblance of the oath he had so often sworn in his heart, that never wife or child should sit with him beneath the roof-tree of the Abbey, came back upon him in its strength, and he knew if he broke it for Una Dysart's sake, he would walk the earth a dishonoured man, a traitor to himself, and with a wail, he would call out her name in accents of farewell.

So did he battle, vainly, fiercely, coming to no issue through the hours of darkness, and when the morning dawned it found him with his lofty head pillowed on the stones, prostrate, haggard, torn with the never-ending conflict.

He lifted up his weary eyes and looked towards the pearl-hued east, where the fair new day was gathering round her all her robes of light, and smiling on the earth that woke responsive with caroling birds and opening flowers, and dewdrops reflecting back the new-born glory; and something there was in the scene that brought before him the image of Una in her bright purity, her fresh unsullied youth, her fearless innocence, and he found the temporary solution of his difficulty in the resolve that he would leave the decision of their mutual destiny to her,—he would tell her all that he could reveal of his cruel position, and that which she decreed for him he would accept, for weal or woe.

When Atherstone had come to his resolution he rose from the stony couch on which he had been stretched, as on a rack, with his own soul for a torturer, and went with slow and weary steps down the rocky path where last he had gone with Una's little soft hand trembling in his own; the charm of her presence came back to him as he staggered on; her fair face seemed to gleam upon him from among the trees, her sweet voice was in every breath of wind, and the longing for her rose so imperiously within his heart that he could scarce restrain himself from turning even then in the direction of Vale House. It was, however, impossible to see her at that hour, and he knew it would be best that he should wait until the evening, when she was certain to be alone, as he had heard Colonel Dysart arrange to drive Mr. Cunliffe to the station in time for the night mail to London. He turned, therefore, towards the Abbey to pass the interval as best he might.

The sun was slowly sinking, after a day of overpowering heat, when at last Humphrey Atherstone passed through the gates of Una's home and went slowly up the avenue towards the house. He walked languidly, like a man recovering from an illness, for a mental conflict such as that he had sustained the night before does more to weaken life and strength than any mere physical malady could accomplish; but there came a gleam of light into his eyes, and his expression of weariness changed to one of energy and eagerness, as he suddenly saw at a little distance the graceful form of the woman on whom his great deep heart had fixed itself with a tenacity which nothing evermore could shake. She was standing in a flower-garden, which lay at one side of the house, below the drawing-room window, looking with thoughtful eyes at the group of tall white lilies which had just reached the perfection of their summer glory.

Atherstone stood still and gazed upon her with eyes that devoured every line of her lovely drooping figure and snow-white draperies. She seemed to him in her whiteness and grace to have a peculiar affinity with the spotless flowers over which she was bending; her hair had all been gathered back from her pure, pale face, glorified by its expression of nobleness and truth, and her whole form, bathed in the last golden gleam of sunset, seemed to shine out with a dazzling brightness.

Atherstone's heart sank as he gazed; for he felt as if it were impossible that this fair stainless woman could take part in a course which diverged in ever so slight a degree from purest honour. He went towards her, and it was new life to him to see the sudden rapture that flashed into her charming face when she perceived him. Without a word, but simply as a trusting child, she placed both her hands in his, and he held them fast a few minutes, as if he could never let her go; then he said quietly from the very intensity of his agitation, "I have much to say to you; you will come into the house and sit down?"

He could see that she trembled, but she turned

at once and went up the steps of the glass door which led to the drawing-room, while he followed her almost like a criminal going to his doom; for it might be—it might be that when he left that house he should be parted from her for ever.

Una took her place on an ottoman in a corner of the room where already the shadows were gathering, and he sat down beside her, leaning for a moment his head upon his hand, as if he lacked the courage to begin the conversation that might decide his fate. At last he spoke, in a voice whose mingled passion and pathos thrilled to her very heart.

"You know, my darling, from what passed between us yesterday, that every hope I can ever have on earth is irrevocably fixed on you. I had never loved any woman before I met you; but from the moment when my eyes first fell on your dear face, I have loved you with a daily increasing intensity, which makes me feel that to part with you now would be worse than death itself. That which for years has been the bane of my life, has, however, thrust itself between you and me, and so long as it was still possible for me to endure the thought of existence without you, I believed it must stand for ever as a fatal bar, shutting me out from the paradise of your sweet presence. That time is past: I cannot—I will not lose you! or brook for a moment the impossibility of your ever being the wife of any other man. Nor do I any longer delude myself into the belief that your friendship, dear as it was, can in any sense stay the hunger of my heart. No! it would but sadden me, by holding perpetually before my eyes the perfect companionship which might bless my home, and I am very sure that the generous sacrifice you spoke of yesterday could only be a life-long torture to us both, if I were base enough to accept it. Therefore I come to you, my Una—my life's angel—to ask that you yourself would set aside the obstacle between us, and tell me that I may redeem my existence from the ban under which it lies, for it cannot be that one so pure and noble as yourself should err in your decision; and you shall be to me a conscience, better and safer than my own."

As he ceased she looked at him with an uneasy bewildered expression. "You must explain to me exactly what you mean," she said; "it is all incomprehensible and vague to me at present."

"So far as I can I will, my dearest; but it is one of the painful complications of my position that even to you I cannot reveal the real nature of the difficulty which has caused me such deep misery. This much, however you can understand. Some years ago, by no fault of my own, I found myself in a position of the cruelest perplexity, in which it seemed impossible that I could hold to the laws of human justice, in the strictest sense, without originating such an amount of evil, widespread and malignant in its results, that I could not think it otherwise than criminal to bring it into existence. There appeared to be but one compromise which could satisfy my own sense of honour, and that was the resolution which I then formed to live a solitary life, unblest by wife or child. The matter was known to no human being but myself, and the decision wholly in my own hands. I could have been called in question by no earthly power if I had resolved to avoid the tremendous evils involved in an adherence to the strictest letter of the law, and yet made no sacrifice of my future happiness; but to satisfy my internal standard of right, I determined to forego marriage, and if I could now convince myself that I was the victim of too rigid a code of honour, there is nothing to prevent me from giving my Quixotic resolutions to the winds, and taking freely of the happiness which is not denied to the poorest man on earth. You can never know, my darling, how terribly I was tempted to do this yesterday, when you spoke those sweetest words which, happen what may, I shall be thankful I have lived to hear; for I could so easily have kept back from you the insupportable obstacle which my own definition of highest rectitude alone has placed between us; but I dared to settle in question in my own favour which another might conscientiously decide for me, and therefore I come to you, my dearest, to ask you to absolve me from the fancied necessity of sacrificing my whole existence to an ideal code of honour; if you will but tell me your own happiness is involved no less than mine,

it will altogether outweigh the seeming obligation of any self-formed law, and then without a doubt or fear I will fling aside the weight which so long has crushed me, and ask from your hands the perfect happiness which you alone can give me."

He ceased, and there was perfect silence for a few minutes, while the destinies of those two living beings hung in the balance.

(To be continued.)

Children's Department.

A LITTLE BOY'S FAITH.

Last winter a little boy of six or eight years, begged a lady to allow him to clean away the snow from her steps. He had no father or mother, but worked his way by such jobs.

"Do you get much to do, my little boy?" said the lady.

"Sometimes I do," said the boy; "but often I get very little."

"And are you never afraid that you will not get enough to live on?"

The child looked up with a perplexed and inquiring eye, as if uncertain of her meaning, and was troubled with a new doubt.

"Why," said he, "don't you think God will take care of a boy if he puts his trust in Him, and does the best, he can?"

MOTHER-LOVE

"A kiss when I wake in the morning,
A kiss when I go to bed,
A kiss when I burn my fingers,
A kiss when I bump my head,
A kiss when my bath is over,
A kiss when my bath begins,
My mamma is full of kisses—
As nurse is full of pins."

HARRY'S PEACHES.

Two rosy peaches, as big as Harry's little hands could hold, and he came in with them feeling very proud indeed.

"Look, mamma, dear," he said.

"I see," she replied. "Will you give me one?"

Harry's face clouded. He held the peaches very tightly.

"I want 'em bofe myself," he said.

"What, both! Don't want your dear mother to have one when you have two? Well, never mind. Somebody else will give peaches to mamma."

Mamma set Harry's chair by the table, and give him her fruit-knife. He was very much pleased when he had the pretty silver knife to use, "Now, dear," she said, "eat all yourself, and try to enjoy them."

She turned her face away, and went on with her sewing. But Harry found that they did not taste good. Selfishness is a bitter sauce. Before long he felt ashamed, and ran to his mother, begging her to share his fruit with him. When, after some persuasion, she consented, he felt happy again.

WHAT A LITTLE GIRL CAN DO.

A little girl of six years old was desirous of putting her pennies into the missionary box with others. When saying her evening prayers at her papa's knee she hesitated a moment, and then added, "Lord, bless my two pennies for Jesus' sake. Amen."

"Oh, what has Jesus done for me?"

He pitied me—my Saviour!

My sins were great, His love was free:

He died for me—my Saviour!

Exalted by the Father's side,

He pleads for me—my Saviour!

A heavenly mansion He'll provide

For all who love the Saviour!"

Some time ago a little boy, twelve years old, on his way to Vermont, stopped at a country tavern, and paid for his lodging and breakfast by sawing wood, instead of asking them as a gift. Fifty years later the boy passed the same little inn as George Peabody, the banker.

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