

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A DAY OF FATE.

BY REV. E. P. ROE.

CHAPTER XVIII.—MRS. YOCOMB'S LETTERS.

I will not weary the reader with my experiences after arriving at New York. I could not have felt worse had I been driven into the Dismal Swamp. My apartments were dusty and stifling, and as cheerless as my feelings.

My editorial chief welcomed me cordially, and talked business. "After you had gone," he was kind enough to say, "we learned your value. Night work is too wearing for you, so please take that office next to mine. I feel a little like breaking down myself, and don't intend to wait until I do, as you did. I shall be off a great deal the rest of the summer, and you'll have to manage things."

"Pile on work," I said; "I'm greedy for it."

"Yes," he replied, laughing, "I appreciate that rare trait of yours; but I shall regard you as insubordinate if you don't take proper rest. Give us your brains, Morton, and leave hack work to others. That's where you blundered before."

Within an hour I was caught in the whirl of the great complicated world, and, as I said to Mr. Yocomb, I had indeed no time to mope. Thank God for work! It's the best antidote this world has for trouble.

But when night came my brain was weary and my heart heavy as lead. It seemed as if the farmhouse was in another world, so diverse was everything there from my present life.

I had given my up-town address to Mrs. Yocomb and went home—if I may apply that term to my dismal boarding place—Tuesday night, feeling assured that there must be a letter. Good Mrs. Yocomb had not failed me, for on my table lay a bulky envelope, addressed in a quaint but clear hand. I was glad no one saw how my hand trembled as I opened her missive and read:

"MY DEAR RICHARD,—I know how anxious thee is for tidings from us all, and especially from one toward whom thy heart is very tender. I will take up the sad story where thee left it. Having all the facts, thee can draw thy own conclusions.

"I found Emily in an almost fainting condition, and I just took her in my arms and let her cry like a child until tears brought relief. It was no time for words. Then I brought her into the house and gave her something that made her sleep in spite of herself. She awoke about an hour before Gilbert Hearn's arrival, and her nervous trepidation at the thought of meeting him was so great that I resolved she should not see him—at least not that night—and I told her so. This gave her great relief, though she said it was cowardly in her to feel so. But in truth she was too ill to see him. Her struggle had been too long and severe, and her nervous system was utterly prostrated. I had Dr. Bates here when Gilbert Hearn came, and the doctor is very discreet. I told him that he must manage so that Emily need not see the one she so feared to meet again, and hinted plainly why, though making no reference to thee, of course. The doctor acted as I wished, not because I wished it, but on professional grounds. 'Miss Warren's future health depends on absolute rest and quiet,' he said to her affianced. 'I not only advise that you do not see her, but I forbid it,' for he was terribly excited—so was his sister, Charlotte Bradford—and it was as much as we could do to keep them from going to her room. If they had, I believe the excitement would have destroyed either her life or reason. Gilbert Hearn plainly intimated that something was wrong. 'Very well, then,' I said, 'bring thy own family physician, and let him consult with Dr. Bates,' and this he angrily said he would do on the morrow. The very fact that they were in the house made the poor girl almost wild; but I stayed with her all night, and she just lay in my arms like a frightened child, and my heart yearned over her as if she were my own daughter. She did not speak of thee, but I heard her murmur once, 'I was cruel—I was unjust to him.'

"In the morning she was more composed, and I made her take strong nourishment, I can tell thee. Thee remembers how I used to dose thee in spite of thyself.

"Well, in the morning Emily seemed to be thinking deeply; and by and by she said, 'Mrs. Yocomb, I want this affair settled at once. I want you to sit by me while I write to him, and advise me.' I felt she was right. Her words were about as follows. (I asked her if I could tell thee what she wrote. She hesitated a little, and a faint colour came into her pale face. 'Yes,' she said at last, 'let him know the whole truth. Since so much has occurred between us, I want him to know everything. He then may judge me as he thinks best. I have a horror of any more misunderstanding.')"

"You can never know, Mr. Hearn," she wrote, "the pain and sorrow with which I address to you these words. Still less can you know my shame and remorse; but you are an honourable man, and have a right to the truth. My best hope is that when you know how unworthy I am of your regard your regret will be slight. I recall all your kindness to me, and my heart is tortured as I now think of the requital I am making. Still, justice to myself requires that I tell you that I mistook my gratitude and esteem, my respect and genuine regard, for a deeper emotion. You will remember, however, that I long hesitated, feeling instinctively that I could not give you what you had a right to expect. Last spring you pressed me for a definite answer. I said I would come to this quiet place and think it all over, and if I did not write you to the contrary within a few days you might believe that I had yielded to your wishes. I found myself more worn and weary from my toilsome life than I imagined. I was lonely; I dreaded my single-handed struggle with the world, and my heart overflowed with gratitude toward you—it does still—for your kindness, and for all that you promised to do for me. I had not the will nor the disposition to say no, or to put you off any

longer. Still I had misgivings; I feared that I did not feel as I ought. When I received your kind letter accepting my silence as consent, I felt bound by it—I was bound by it. I have no excuse to offer; I have no defence to make. I can only state the miserable truth. I cannot love you as a wife ought, and I know now that I never can. I've tried—God knows I've tried. I'm worn out with the struggle. I fear I am very ill. I wish I were dead and at rest. I cannot ask you to think mercifully of me. I cannot think mercifully of myself. To meet again would be only useless suffering. I am not equal to it. My one effort now is to gain sufficient strength to go to some distant relatives in the West. Please forget me.

"In sorrow and bitter regret,

"EMILY WARREN."

I started up and paced the room distractedly. "The generous girl!" I exclaimed, "she lays not a particle of blame on me. But, by Jove! I'd like to take all the blame, and have it out with him here and now. Blame! What blame is there? The poor child! Why can't she see that she is white as snow?"

Again I eagerly turned to Mrs. Yocomb's words: "Emily seemed almost overwhelmed at the thought of his reading this letter. She is so generous, so sensitive, that she saw only his side of the case, and made scarcely any allowance for herself. I was a little decided and plain-spoken with her, and it did her good. At last I said to her, 'I am not weak-minded, if I am simple and plain. Because I live in the country is no reason why I do not know what is right and just. There is no cause to blame myself so bitterly.' 'Does Mr. Yocomb feel and think as you do?' she asked. 'Of course he does,' I replied. She put her hands to her head and said pitifully, 'Perhaps I am too distracted to see things clearly. I sometimes fear I may lose my reason.'

"Well, Emily," I said, "thee has done right. Thee cannot help feeling as thee does, and to go on now would be as great a wrong to Gilbert Hearn as to thyself. Thee has done just as I would advise my own daughter, to do. Leave all with me. Thee need not see him again. I am going to stand by thee;" and I left her quite heartened up."

"Oh, but you are a gem of a woman!" I cried. "A few more like you would bring the millennium."

"Gilbert Hearn was dreadfully taken aback by the letter; but I must do him the justice to say that he was much touched by it too, for he called me again into the parlour, and I saw that he was much moved. He had given his sister the letter to read, and she muttered, 'Poor thing!' as she finished it. He fixed his eyes sternly on me and said, 'Mr. Morton is at the bottom of this thing.' I returned his gaze very quietly, and asked, 'What am I to infer by this expression of thy opinion to me?' His sister was as quick as a flash, and she said plainly, 'Gilbert, these people were not two little children in Mrs. Yocomb's care.' 'Thee is right,' I said; 'I have not controlled their actions any more than I have those of thy brother. Richard Morton is absent, however, and were we not under peculiar obligations to him I would still be bound to speak for him, since he is not here to speak for himself. I have never seen Richard Morton do anything unbecoming a gentleman. Has thee, Gilbert Hearn? If so, I think thee had better see him, for he is not one to deny thee any explanation to which thee has a right.' 'Why did he go to the city so suddenly?' he asked angrily. 'I will give thee his address,' I said coldly. 'Gilbert,' expostulated his sister, 'we have no right to cross-question Mrs. Yocomb.' 'Since thee is so considerate,' I said to her, 'I will add that Richard Morton intended to return on Second Day at the latest, and he chose to go to-day. His action enables me to give thee a room to thyself.' 'Gilbert,' said the lady, 'I do not see that we have any reason to regret his absence. As Mrs. Yocomb says, you can see him in New York; but unless you have well founded and specific charges to make, I think it would compromise your dignity to see him. Editors are ugly customers to stir up unless there is good cause.'

"I know one," I growled, "that would be a particularly ugly customer just now."

"In Emily Warren's case," I said, "it is different," Mrs. Yocomb continued. "She is a motherless girl and has appealed to me for advice and sympathy. In her honest struggle to be loyal to thee she has worn herself almost to a shadow, and I have grave fears for her reason and her life, so great is her prostration. She has for thee, Gilbert Hearn, the sincerest respect and esteem, and the feeling that she has wronged thee, even though she cannot help it, seems almost to crush her." 'Gilbert,' said his sister warmly, 'you cannot blame her, and you certainly ought to respect her. If she were not an honest-hearted girl she would never have renounced you with your great wealth.' He sank into a chair and looked very white. 'It's a terrible blow,' he said; 'it's the first severe reverse I've ever had.' 'Well,' she replied, 'I know from your character that you will meet it like a man and a gentleman.' 'Certainly,' he said, with a deep breath, 'I cannot do otherwise.' I then rose and bowed, saying, 'You will both excuse me if I am with my charge much of the time. Adah will attend to your wants, and I hope you will feel at home so long as it shall please you to stay.'

"By Jove! but her tact was wonderful. Not a diplomat in Quakeress could have done better. The innocent-looking Quakeress was a match for them both."

"Then I went back to Emily," Mrs. Yocomb wrote, "and I found her in a pitiable state of excitement. When I opened the door she started up apprehensively, as if she feared that the man with whom she had broken would burst in upon her with bitter reproaches. I told her everything; for even I cannot deceive her, she is so quick. Her mind was wonderfully lightened, and I soon made her sleep again. She awoke in the evening much quieter, but she cried a good deal in the night, and I think she was thinking of thee more than of herself or of him. I wished thee had waited until all this was over, but I think all will come out right."

"Oh, the unutterable folly that I was!" I groaned; "I'm the champion blunderer of the world."

"Well, Richard, this is the longest letter I ever wrote, and I must bring it to a close, for my patient needs me. I

will write soon again, and tell thee everything. Good-night.

"Second Day. P. S.—I left my letter open to add a postscript. Gilbert Hearn and his sister left this morning. The former at last seemed quite calm and resigned, and was very polite. His sister was too. She amused me not a little. I do not think that her heart was greatly set on the match, and she was not so troubled but that she could take an interest in our quiet, homely ways. I think we seemed to her like what you city people call *bric-a-brac*, but she was too much of a lady to let her curiosity become offensive. She took a great fancy to Adah, especially as she saw that Adah was very fond of her, and she persuaded her brother to leave the child here in our care, saying that she was improving wonderfully. He did not seem at all averse to the plan. Adah is behaving very nicely, if I do say it, and shewed a great deal of quiet, gentle dignity. She and Charlotte Bradford had a long chat in the evening about Adah. Adah says, 'Send Richard my love;' and if I put in all the messages from father, Reuben, and Zillah, they would fill another sheet.

"I asked Emily if she had any message for thee. She buried her face in the pillow and murmured, 'Not now, not yet;' but after a moment she turned toward me, looking white and resolute. 'Tell him,' she said, 'to forgive me and forget.' Be patient, Richard. Wait.

"Thine affectionately,

"RUTH YOCOMB."

"Forget!" I shouted. "Yes, when I am annihilated," and I paced my room for hours. At last, exhausted, I sought such rest as I could obtain, but my last thought was, "God bless Ruth Yocomb. I could kiss the ground she had trodden."

The next morning I settled down to my task of waiting and working, resolving that there must be no more nights like the last, in which I had wasted a vast amount of vital force. I wrote to Mrs. Yocomb, and thanked her from a full heart. I sent messages to all the family, and said: "Tell Adah I shall keep her love warm in my heart, and that I send her twice as much of mine in return. Like all brothers, I shall take liberties, and will subscribe in her behalf for the two best magazines in the city. Give Miss Warren this simple message: The words I last spoke to her shall ever be true."

I also told Mrs. Yocomb of my promotion, and that I was no longer a night-owl.

Toward the end of the week came another bulky letter, which I devoured, letting my dinner grow cold.

"Our life at the farm-house has become very quiet," she wrote. "Emily improves slowly, for her nervous system has received a severe strain. I told her that thee had sent messages to all the family, and asked if she did not expect one. 'I've no right to any—thee's no occasion for any,' she faltered; but her eyes were very wistful and entreating. 'Well,' I said, 'I must clear my conscience, and since he sent thee one, I must give it. He writes, 'Say to Miss Warren in reply, that the last words I spoke to her shall ever be true.' 'I suppose thee knows what he means,' I said, smiling; 'I don't.' She buried her face in the pillow again; but I think thy message did her good, for she soon fell asleep, and looked more peaceful than at any time yet."

At last there came a letter saying, "Emily has left us and gone to a cousin—a Mrs. Vining—who resides at Columbus, Ohio. She is much better, but very quiet—very different from her old self. Father put her on the train, and she will have to change cars only once. 'Emily,' I said to her, 'thee cannot go away without one word for Richard.' She was deeply moved, but her resolute will gained the mastery. 'I am trying to act for the best,' she said. 'He has appealed to the future; the future must prove us both, for there must be no more mistakes.' 'Does thee doubt thyself, Emily?' 'I have reason to doubt myself, Mrs. Yocomb,' she replied. 'But what does thy heart tell thee?' A deep solemn look came into her eyes, and after a few moments she said, 'Pardon me, my dear friend, if I do not answer you fully. Indeed, I would scarcely know how to answer you. I have entered on an experience that is new and strange to me. I am troubled and frightened at myself. I want to go away among strangers, where I can think and grow calm. I want to be alone with my God. I should always be weak and vacillating here. Moreover, Mr. Morton has formed an impression of me, of which, perhaps, I cannot complain. This impression may grow stronger in his mind. It has all been too sudden. His experiences have been too intermingled with storm, delirium, and passion. He has not had time to think any more than I have. In the larger sphere of work to which you say he has been promoted he may find new interests that will be absorbing. After a quiet and distant retrospect he may thank me for the course I am taking.' 'Emily!' I exclaimed, 'for so tender-hearted a girl thee is very strong.' 'No,' she replied, 'but because I have learned my weakness I am going away from temptation.' I then asked, 'Is thee willing I should tell Richard what thee has said?' After thinking for some time she answered, 'Yes, let everything be based on the simple truth. But tell him he must respect my action—he must leave me to myself.' The afternoon before she left us, Adah and Reuben went over to the village and got some beautiful rosebuds, and Adah brought them up after tea. Emily was much touched, and kissed her again and again. Then she threw herself into my arms and cried for nearly an hour, but she went away bravely. I never can think of it with dry eyes. Zillah was heart-broken, and Reuben clung to her in a way that surprised me. He has been very remorseful that he treated her badly at one time. Adah and I were mopping our eyes, and father kept blowing his nose like a trumpet. She gave way a little at the last moment, for Reuben ran down to the barn and brought out Dapple that she might say good-bye to him, and she put her arms around the pretty creature's neck and sobbed for a moment or two. I never saw a horse act so. He followed her right up to the rockaway steps. At last she said, 'Come, let us go, quick!' I shall never forget the scene, and I think that she repressed so much feeling that we had to express it for her.