

THE LITTLE OLD SECRETARY

(Concluded)

Three hours later Ewan wrote: "He is going fast—Eva must come—warn her to be very calm. It is all right—he is peaceful as a child."

Te two young girls, escorted by Mrs. Hanson, proceeded to the chamber of death. Poor Eva had wept till she had exhausted the fountain of her tears, and was externally calm, but she was still trembling, and clung to Kathleen, hardly realizing what she was going to witness.

The dying man was raised high on his pillows, supported on the one side by Ewan, on the other by the priest. On a small altar opposite the bed was a crucifix, and the candles, which had been lit for his first and last Communion, still shone like stars amongst the lovely flowers of the East. But the expression on that death-like face was beautiful beyond words. It was the innocent beauty of childhood, with a certain radiance about it as of heaven foreseen.

Eva pressed closer to Kathleen, involuntarily exclaiming: "Is it really himself?"

Ewan beckoned her to come close to the bed.

"Yes, it is your cousin Cochrane, Eva," said the dying man, holding out his hand kindly. "God bless you, my dear little cousin. It was the best day's work I ever did when I made up my mind to bring you here; so you must not fret over my death. It is a day of joy for me," while a bright, holy smile irradiated his face and made it inexpressibly lovely. Then turning to Ewan, he asked: "Where is her future companion, your sister?"

His dim eyes could see nothing but that which was close before him. Kathleen came to his side, and bending over him, so that he might see her face, laid her hand upon his.

"You cousin shall be to me as a sister," she said in a soft voice, but speaking slowly and very clearly.

"Thank God she has fallen into such good hands," he replied earnestly. "You will take care of her, Miss McDermot. We have never done anything but drag her down; you will build her up in her religion, and make her death-bed as happy as your brother has made mine. I pray God to bless and reward you both."

He did not speak to them again; his thoughts were evidently far away, and it was an effort to recall them. Then the priest recited, in low, clear tones, the prayers for the dying. He did not know the right responses, but every now and then he said "Amen," with such a peaceful smile, as if he felt that everything was being done for him that his heart could wish.

When the priest's voice ceased, the dying man raised his eyes towards Ewan.

"It is my turn now," he said, in a feeble voice. "I am going to cry out for blessings on you—my brother—my friend."

Ewan bent down and pressed his lips long and fervently on the cold forehead; and then Kathleen saw what the old nurse had called "a glory" on her brother's face. His eyes were beaming with the light of love, and every trace of anguish had vanished from his brow. This was the first soul to which his lips had brought salvation, and this soul in particular seemed the tenderest token of his Heavenly Father's forgiveness that could have been granted him.

Suddenly over that dying face of wonderful beauty a gray shadow drifted. The

priest raised his anointed hand to give the last blessing, the eyes opened full and luminous, and the soul of Oswald Cochrane was with God.

They said the "De Profundis" round the bed, and then Kathleen drew the weeping Eva away. Ewan followed for a moment to give a few directions.

"Oh! Ewan," whispered Kathleen, "God's retributions—how wonderful they are! What do you think of this?"

His glorious smile lit up his face like sunrise.

"I think it is my first glimpse of Heaven's love!" he answered earnestly.

The next mail bore a joint despatch to Lord Melton from Eva and Kathleen, which more than satisfied him as to the future happiness of his adopted child.

Such days as she had spent with the McDermots were more than years of common life, and, though her heart was very sore at her cousin's death, she ended her letter by saying, "she was so happy at the thought of her new home that nothing made her fret."

Kathleen had to relate to him all the circumstances of Captain Cochrane's death. She told of his conversion, wrought by the remembrance of Ewan's words when he was brought out to die. She told of his fever of anguish when, though he did not recognize in Ewan the man whom he had injured, the voice and look stirred up old memories, and he kept moaning that the blood of a fellow-creature "was on his soul, and would be its loss. And then how Ewan, feeling that the hand of death was upon the poor sufferer, thought it cruel to withhold the truth and revealed it to him, assuring him that he was not dead, but, led by the good God to him in his extremity, was standing there by his side to comfort him in his sickness and help him to the last. She went on to describe the seal of exquisite child-like beauty which the freshly-baptized soul had stamped upon the dying man's outward frame; so that after his death numbers had been drawn to look upon him, and could hardly bear to let him go from them to the grave. Finally, she recounted the change—Captain Cochrane's happy death had worked in her brother, rolling away the last heavy cloud of desolation that had so darkened his spirit.

The letter ended thus: "We take our dear Eva, whom I already love as a sister, to Brindisi to-morrow, there to await the arrival of my parents, who are coming all the way by sea. The improvement in my father, before he left Ireland, was such as to give the utmost confidence that a winter in Italy, with his freedom now from all anxiety, will completely restore him. I wish you could see his happy letters. He wrote in the greatest glee about the piano. How my mother walked all unconsciously into the drawing-room one day and saw it standing in the old place with her favorite piece, 'Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him,' laid open on it. She stood, one moment in surprise; then, thinking no one was near, sat down and sang out those beautiful words with such a passion of joy and gratitude and love that never in his whole life, my father said, had he heard from her such thrilling notes. He has written on that song of Mendelssohn's a favorite passage of his from the Old Scriptures: 'I will give her the valley of Achor, to be the opening of hope, and she shall sing to me as in the days of her youth.' Oh! dear Lord Melton, you

have done everything for us we could wish, and I tell you our little joys as well as our great ones, because, though all has come so straight from God, you have been the visible agent of His good Providence."

This letter touched Lord Melton more than he was willing to own. His reply to both letters was characteristic. He begged Eva,

"Not to fret for a moment over Oswald's death; he was probably saved from the much more terrible fate which seemed awaiting all Europeans from the incarnate fiend loose over the land." He told her "his fondest wish for her was satisfied, and in his mind's eye he saw her grown into the woman he always hoped she would become."

To Kathleen he wrote: "The immense service you have done me in meeting Eva and caring for my poor nephew has made me much your debtor. I wish I were in his place. God bless you for your letter. It has been to me one single ray of purity and peace, shining through such a deluge of horrors that my soul is sick to death."

These were the last words he ever had time or opportunity to write, either to Kathleen or to Eva. The press of duty during that disastrous summer absorbed his whole strength and time. Some months afterwards they received intelligence that he had died of dysentery—"sick to death," as he had himself expressed it, at the unspeakable horror of the Cawnpore massacre. One of his friends wrote at his desire to Eva. In her letter there was one mysterious message to Kathleen: "Tell her," the message said, "it was with me at the last as she desired."

Kathleen knew well to what he referred, and the last line of her idyl was a prophecy of immortal hope.

CHAPTER XXI

Not once or twice in our rough island story, He who walks it only thirsting For the right and learns to deaden Love of self, before his journey closes, He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting into glossy purples, which outreddden All voluptuous garden-roses. —Tennyson.

We must pass over a period of six years, during which Madonna's child was as faithful in her joy as she had been in her sorrows, and expanded into the fair blossom of which the bud had given promise.

The six years had been years of unbroken tranquility. The blessing of the poor had made the McDermots flourish, and their fervent prayers had brought down peace.

At first Eva had some few difficulties. The way in which she had been left almost uncontrolled in the matter of her religious duties made many things that came naturally to Kathleen appear to her as painful restraints. She soon, however, became so devotedly attached to Mrs. McDermot that she quickly yielded herself to the gentle training of such a motherly heart, while her deep affection for Kathleen roused within her deep desire to become in everything, as like her adopted sister as possible.

Ewan never married. An immensely strong bond of sympathy had sprung up between him and his father on the subject of the better training of their poor tenantry. Ewan's eighteen months of stern pauper life, trodden down under one single crime, which to all appearance would shut him out from the society of his equals for life, had given him an experience and a sympathy with the trials which sometimes overtake men and crush even the strong, that was a liv-

ing power in his soul. He and his father thought and planned together, and then Ewan set his whole strength on the achievement of their plans and worked with all his might.

Then mischievous Eva was wont to laugh at him and say that he would not take to himself a wife for fear she should make him wash his hands oftener and keep his hair smooth. Kathleen knew better. His ideal was his mother, and while he could have her to be the angel of his home, no-one else had any chance of winning his heart.

"I should pity the unhappy woman who had to bear daily comparison with mother," said Kathleen one day. "She grows more beautiful, more like a pearl than ever."

Eva and Kathleen were both brides at two-and-twenty, engaged about the same time and married on the same day.

Eva was wedded to an English gentleman of great wealth and good family, a Mr. Courtenay. Her only regret was, that as her husband had large estates and strong local interests in England, she was likely to be much separated from those who had so completely replaced the home affections she had so early lost.

Kathleen betrothed was an Irish baronet with a heart of gold, a good old name, and very little in purse.

Mr. McDermot, though charmed with Brian O'Regan's character, felt some anxiety about the prudence of allowing the engagement. But his hesitation was cut short by Ewan, who insisted that the whole of his mother's fortune and everything independent of Dermot's Hill should be settled on his sister. The rents were coming in now well and regularly, thanks to their untiring efforts for the improvement of the tenants; and Ewan said with honest pride that Dermot's Hill would always be enough for him. Thus a provision for the future was secured; and, for the present, two people of such simple habits as Kathleen and her husband might be trusted to make the most of a small income. Such an unusual occurrence as two weddings in one day made, as may be supposed, a great sensation at Glenmore. The lane from Dermot's Hill to the little chapel was transformed into a triumphal passage, spanned at intervals with arches of triumphal flowers, contributions from all the country round; while the village maidens had obtained leave to walk in a body before the two brides and bridesmaids all the way from the house to the church. In truth, a more than royal pomp, the growth of spontaneous affection, was shown in every possible way that could be devised.

A large gathering of the Fitzgerald clan had been invited, and the bridal presents made a very imposing show. Amongst them was a silver casket containing the wedding gift of Eva and her husband to her adopted sister. It was labelled: "Not to be opened till after the marriage ceremony." Much curiosity was excited by this prohibition, and as soon as the first part of the breakfast was completed, Cousin Jack, now a gallant lieutenant in the Guards, declared that the curiosity of the fair Eves of the company could wait no longer, and that Kathleen's silver casket must be opened.

"Mrs. Courtenay," he said, making a profoundly grave bow to Eva, "you will intercede with Mr. Courtenay on behalf of your fair friends, and gain me permission to satisfy their curiosity?"

An amused whisper passed between Eva and her husband; then, turning to Jack, Eva replied with a mock gravity: "I will intercede with Mr. Courtenay on behalf of your fair friends, and gain me permission to satisfy their curiosity?"

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ity, while twinkle shone "Yes, we f permission, t most curious company to t And she lau key into Jack There was ping of hand "Black" cal Jack. Never refuse the b t eagerly, (to the lock casket, drew parchment seals attache slow whistle, over his 'he meanwhile v browns and blank astoni shared in by with the exc culprits them sparkled with Mr. McDerm as guardian, with Eva's h ments was than any on Cousin Jac the document —read the at the end— sion of his up to the ce it again, he bravissimo! heirress of An no mistake! "But, inde a great mis McDermot, s looking quit could never thing of the leave of hea that she nev "You forg said Eva, sn lovingly int eyes, "that expired whe Mr. Courter look at the find that I had the pow It was qu plomatic pa would never Dermot's sc deed prepa taking it to had signed the sacrify their united "It's true, "true as Gos Mary Court George Cou life, and wi My dear un generalled and must k Mr. McD der accor down, his dewy, while Eden-you c seen a face er happine smiling her thanks to E nay. Kath tirely happy though so looked-for made her v she was as as she was it had been her to thin nor hersel larly look there. Mr. Cour "It is the "that I ha the mouth wife." Ho word, as world to e together w those from I have the conveying India, a with a heart, unt pline, un for other woman's These are herself. In all she ne