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EUSTACE; OR, SELF-DEVOTION. CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

Doubtless, the work might have been of a nature but ill calculated for the frame of a man on whose constitution the irregularity of his life had already made fearful inroads.

I hoped for no reform, I cared not think that good fruit would ever bloom on the withered branches of such a tree, and I looked for nothing but a return of new sorrow, of fresh grief.

I said nothing to him till the next morning, then I told him that I had not yet paid my father's little debts, that Margaret had sought a situation solely to make up for the money allowed to Arthur, chiefly on account of his children, and for the assistance we from time to time rendered to himself.

I strove to speak with a calmness I was far from feeling, and replied, 'Indeed, I shall not dispute that point with you; my notions of right and wrong happen to be somewhat old-fashioned, and very firmly fixed, and as I happened to be a sharer in the goods to obtain which my father died in debt, I choose that they should be paid for; in the second place, were this not the case, I should glory in paying as far as I can the few debts he contracted, therefore, Edgar, if we part friendship on this score, it must be so.'

I could not judge what Edgar really meant by his words; they were, alas! often not to be relied upon: neither was his countenance the index of his soul.

and myself, and left us, our hearts truly told us not for long.

During the day Margaret missed a small gold chain, one of the articles parted with in the days of our poverty, and which I had recovered for her, and worse, far worse than all, our dear mother's miniature was gone—that miniature whose history I have previously given, and with which so many painful circumstances were connected.

CHAPTER VII.—TIDINGS FROM THE NEW WORLD.

It was drawing towards the close of a soft lovely evening in the month of May following my father's death. All the early floral favorites are blooming in our cottage garden, the air redolent with their sweet perfume; and despite the anxious forebodings at my heart respecting Edgar, who has never left Ashdale, the contemplation of the fair face of nature carries me above myself, the world, and the world's harassing cares.

'You will be surprised, dearest Minnie, that you hear from me from this place, from which my brother has already departed on his homeward journey. I will not pause to dwell on the virtues of that dear brother, you know them already, and also how much he has sacrificed for me, for his father, for us all. Suffice it for me to tell you, that when he came to this place his handsome income, through the dearth of provisions, and the exorbitant sum charged for house-rent, together with the allowance which he sent home each quarter, left him miserably deficient for his own expenses.'

'He saved, Minnie, in every possible way;—nay, when his own office was closed, his work was not yet completed, though his clerks were then resting from their labor. I will tell you how I found this out—I was seized with fever, and it appears I had lain for many days delirious. Previous to my illness I had observed that after the office was closed, Eustace left home, and never returned till half-past eleven at night, on a moment earlier or later. My curiosity was excited, but I forbore to question him, for I knew my brother's character too well to injure him even in thought by any unworthy suspicion. I knew and felt sure that there was something he wished to conceal from me, and, curious as I was, I kept silence, respecting, meanwhile, his reasons for the secret he chose to withhold.'

'I had, as I have said, been delirious for many days. When I recovered my consciousness, it seemed to me about the close of evening, as a faint light of declining day still lingered in the room, stealing dimly through the half-closed curtains of the windows and draped bed. I rested my head on my hand in raising myself into a half-reclining position, and looked around with that dreamy sort of wonder we experience when reason, having for time departed, is again restored to us, and to my great surprise, I beheld a lady clad in the garb of a nun leaning against the window. I saw, too, a shadow as it were of the form of man move across the room, and at the same time I heard my brother say, 'Thanks be to God, and your gentle care, Sister Cecile, my dear sister will, the doctor thinks, still live. I shall be back at my customary hour, when it may be that this death-like stupor will have passed away.'

'I think you said, Mr. Maxwell, that your sister was not aware that you were hard at work each night so many hours after the office is closed,' replied a soft voice. 'I make this inquiry lest I should inadvertently betray your secret.'

'On no account tell her,' replied Eustace, 'I have always kept my employment a secret to her because I knew, were she aware of it, that not only would she feel excessively pained herself, but that the truth would then be made known to my poor family; those few odd hours, Sister Cecile, are given freely to save the declining years of the aged from suffering; but they must not know that it is at the cost of what doctors say is requisite for necessary relaxation, and God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and will give me the strength he sees necessary.'

'As our brave-hearted, noble Eustace uttered these words he left the room. I had not the strength to call him back, but, bathed in tears, I threw myself again on the bed. The movement of the clothes attracted the notice of the good sister of charity, who, drawing near, soon discovered from my exclamations that I had at last discovered the secret of my brother. Placing her hand on my lips she, however, enjoined silence, adding, 'You must be very quiet now; thank God for your recovery: for your life has been despaired of, and great has been the grief of your poor brother; everything still depends on

great care on our part and a tranquil and easy state of mind on your own.'

'I raised my hands; they were wondrously thin and transparent. I then put my hand on my head, the long brown tresses in which I used to take delight had vanished. I felt so weak that it was only by a great effort that I could move. I seemed as if about to sink—as if life were parting from me—I turned faint, and it was not till the good nun had administered some strong restoratives that I began to recover.'

'You have suffered very much,' she said, 'and I will not answer for the consequences if you allow the slightest emotion to distress you. Your good brother, when he thought you were dying, called on our Mother Superior to solicit the attendance of one of the religious for your sick couch. I was the person selected; added my kind friend, 'but I have nothing more to tell you at present, and counsel you, as soon as you have taken a little nourishment, to try and sleep, for you must not see your brother till the morning.'

'Sister Cecile then brought me some light and nourishing food, which I amused myself by watching her prepare with her own delicate hands; after partaking of which I fell into that deep and dreamless sleep which tells that the crisis has passed. I did not wake till nearly the following morning; and through the parted curtains, I saw the red sunlight streaming in, and heard in the street without the sound of cheerful voices, and, at my door, that one very dear to me, uttering the words: 'Does she still sleep? I would much like to speak to her before I leave home for the day.'

'The current of life was now flowing freshly within my veins. I balt raised myself in the bed, drew aside the curtains, and uttered the name of Eustace; the next moment I was folded in my brother's arms.'

'My own dear little Gertrude,' he exclaimed, 'the bliss of this moment amply repays me for what I have suffered on your account! You will soon get well and strong under Sister Cecile's tender care; and I have preserved all your long hair, and we will have it so dexterously made up again that no one shall know that the spiteful scissors have ever taken it from your head,' he added, half sighing as he spoke.

'Never mind the loss of the hair,' I replied; 'it will soon grow again on my young head; as for myself, every other feeling is lost in gratitude to the good God who has preserved my life; to your care, my gentle nurse,' I added, addressing the nun; 'and to you, my more than brother, for, ah! I know your secret now; I know that your life is void of comfort because you are the only son of a poor family.'

'Say not so, Gertrude,' he replied, 'say not my life is void of comfort. In those very efforts of which you speak, I find that comfort—the proud consciousness of doing my duty; it will sustain me, my sister, in the hour which will usher me into eternity—when my hair shall have whitened with the snows of age, and my own strength has decayed, then shall I lean with confidence on the providence of my God, assured that He will comfort and sustain me.'

'By slow but sure degrees I recovered my health. Who could fail to do so when watched so carefully by my gentle nurse? She is a woman over whose head perhaps fifty years have passed, yet there is no line traced by care on her fair open forehead; indeed, why should it be so? For one of a tolerably rich family, she left the world ere she had ever known its trials and cares. In the order which she chose, that of Sisters of Charity, there was an ample field for the exercise of her own charitable impulsive feelings; and her smooth and somewhat buxom form; and cheerful, easy, smiling countenance, told me that she had known no sorrow save that which her gentle heart had made her experience when witnessing the griefs of others; yet here, too there was a contrary feeling at work;—for, she continued, when telling me her tale, 'the grief I have felt at witnessing pain, for instance, has been amply soothed by the pleasure I have experienced in being able to relieve it.'

'I must now tell you my secret, Minnie. I shall not return home with Eustace; there is much work to be done here, and but few laborers in the vineyard. Long ago my mother told me she would never oppose her own feelings to that of a child, whether a religious vocation or marriage were concerned. I have decided, and am about to join Sister Cecile in her convent.—Were I my mother's only daughter, or did my parents now require the very little I could earn as a governess, I would do all that lay in my power for them, ere I retired from the world to devote my life to acts of charity for those who are strangers to me; but this is not the case, and for me to waver would be to throw aside the grace of a vocation.'

do the will of God within the walls of a convent, hoping thereby to find happiness, both here and hereafter, that my noble-hearted brother will not fail to find it also, if with Margaret they tread the thorny path of life together; for, believe me, Minnie, the good son and brother is sure to make a good husband too.'

'I regret to hear your health still fails; write soon, and believe me, with the truest affection, 'Your attached

'GERTRUDE.' This letter did indeed fill me with surprise, for I had never the slightest idea that Gertrude's vocation would be that of the cloister; then passing from the remembrance of herself to that of her noble-hearted brother, I thanked God with all my heart that the devotion of a mind so noble as his should be offered to my poor Margaret. I felt that the sun of my own life would set whilst it was yet day, and I trembled at the bare thought of leaving her without any natural protector, and herself merely dependent on her precarious employment as a governess. As the day wore on I occupied myself alternately with a book or with my work; but my mind was pre-occupied: the welcome letter of the morning filled my every thought; and now, as the afternoon wore away, I prepared to meet Margaret on her daily journey homeward. I rejoiced to think that this laborious life would soon be over; and preparing to throw on my shawl, I stood one moment at the glass arranging my hair ere I descended the stairs.

Sometimes a thought crosses over our minds which we have never before entertained. I remembered Gertrude's remark about the nun, and applied it to myself as I gazed on my forehead, over which so many a line was deeply ploughed, the furrows, traced by care, also marked clearly and distinctly between the brows, rarely to be seen on a woman, especially if not more than thirty-five summers have rolled over her head. And fifty years had left that nun's brow so smooth and so unwrinkled, I said; but what, oh what dost thou know of sorrow or care! Like the smooth waters of some tiny rivulet on a peaceful summer day, when not a breath of air disturbs its rippling wavelets, so does her life glide gently on, save when, perhaps, here or there some casual circumstances, such as the death of some dear friend she knew in the world, or the transit from time to eternity of one of those who now may be said to form the world to her, have passed away, then, indeed, like unto a stone thrown into the waters is the peaceful tenor of her life disturbed; but anon, the wavelets close over it, and the waters glide peacefully by.'

But, ah! not so with the child of sorrow and of care, who, emerged on the stormy sea of this world with the lowering clouds of fortune gathering thickly around him, too often vainly strives to avoid the threatened shipwreck, for storms and tempests gather thickly above and around him, and the little bark struggles painfully, still painfully on, sometimes threatening destruction, as wave dashes against wave; then again there is a lull, and hope with her fairy wand beckons us onward, but many are the dangers that still surround us; and if, mayhap, that little bark be safely brought to shore, the remembrance of those perils and sufferings are never forgotten, and the trace of anxiety and care shows itself on countenance of man and woman, too, for of a truth their own faces tell the tale; the expression of thoughtful anxious care, the lines and furrows, are never seen on the brows of those who have not suffered.'

But hold, Minnie, here comes one whose brow is yet smooth and neat light; her twenty-five years have not yet left any trace behind them. I had lost time in my melancholy musings, and the merry voice of Margaret rang in my ears as she ran up stairs warbling a few words of a favorite song.

'Come hither, oh come hither! O'er the wood and o'er the lea, Ramble with me through the heather, I've a tale to tell to thee. The morning sun shines brightly, O'er hill and grassy dale; And its warm rays kiss so lightly The dewdrops in the vale. I have a tale of gladness To pour into thine ear, Which will chase away thy sadness, And drive away that tear, Oh, fleeting is life's sorrow, At the worst 'twill soon be o'er; Then hasten, love, my borrow Hope's bright wand for evermore. Then come, my love, and wander, Through each dingle, nook, and dell; On fair Nature's works well ponder, Of her priceless blessings tell. We will hasten through the heather, Neath the hill and by the fell; Then hasten, love, come hither, I've a tale of joy to tell.'

CHAPTER VIII.—THE THUNDER-STORM—AN OLD FRIEND—CLOUDS AND SUNSHINE. Let me be faithful to my duty as a journalist,

as far as possible, still there are many epochs in my life, which I feel I touch upon reluctantly, many circumstances which I would fain pass by altogether, and many, I feel are the scenes occasioned by pecuniary distress, which I have altogether passed by, or spoken of but lightly.—It seemeth to me now, as I look back and take a review of my past life, that much of the misery which has befallen us would have been spared as we were not of the fortunate few who were born to the possession of an independent income, which, however small it may be, might still suffice for the strict necessities of life, had we, in a worldly sense, been roid of what is called talent and genius, and been content to act and think like the majority of those who compose what may be termed the middle classes. If we could not succeed in the path most clearly pointed out to us, by the adaptation of the particular talent we possessed, we were sure to fall as we truly had done, and which has been the lot of many before us, to a state of distress far beyond that which the meanest artisan may chance to know. At the same time, where lives the being who, aware that he possesses any particular talent, who, like the slothful servant in the Gospel, considers himself justified in wrapping that talent in a napkin, and burying it? Moreover, the very fact that he possesses it, disinclines him for the performance of those perhaps more servile duties, to which we often find persons sink, who by their birth might be expected to look far beyond the point they have been contented to attain. Again, it were idle to suppose, passing by the painter, the sculptor, the author, or composer of successive ages, that the man of letters, for instance, could stoop to the performance of what are looked upon as servile or menial offices. Education ennobles and enlightens, and refines the mind; and it is perfectly ridiculous, and would present an absolute anomaly in nature, could we suppose that the man or woman who feels, nay, who knows, that they possess within themselves abilities and energies not granted to all, would stoop to the performance of any lowly duty, conscious that, in the teeth of every obstacle, without money to prosecute a single effort, they have yet overcome almost insurmountable difficulties; they have mastered unaided and alone the difficulties attendant on the construction of a language; they have felt that wonderful capability within them, of taking in as it were its intricacies at one glance; that instead of plodding slowly on they can accomplish more in one short month than others can in a year with all the appliances and aids which money brings to help them; take even the linguist, then and in sober truth let us ask ourselves how can we expect a person thus gifted to sink himself beneath his natural position in life.

Yet, if we come to the coarser animal wants of this our poor human nature, we must own, though we would not for all earth can afford exchange the cultivated mind for that of the rough untutored hind, that this same hind, poor as he is may ofttimes lead a happier and more contented life than the man of genius. Certainly he is often, relatively speaking, a richer man.

But to return to my tale. On one fine midsummer evening we found ourselves again in Mrs. Maxwell's hospitable home, for their exiled son was expected home on the following week; and having positively declined our kind friend's invitation to be present at the time of the return of one so long absent from the family hearth, we timed our visit so as to leave at least three days before his return.

The sun was slowly setting, and it was one of the most gorgeous sunsets I have ever beheld.—The day had been extremely hot, but a soft breeze arose towards evening, and Margaret, Lucy, and myself, all agreed that a walk in the quiet evening hour would be far preferable to the house. Slowly, slowly set the sun in its bed of gold, and far, far around the western horizon, the clouds are tipped with livelier colors than the art of man can ever imitate, the bright sapphire and deep vermilion fading away in the distance to the palest amber, and here and there a rich streak of purple cast over that glorious effulgence a more sombre hue. Very long we wandered, heedless of the approach of night, till we found ourselves in the village churchyard. This place much reminded me of our own old locality, Kirklands. The churchyard was raised a little above the high-road, and was skirted by a row of fine trees, principally the yew and beech. The graves were, as is generally the case in our country churchyards, kept in admirable order; there were a few handsome monumental stones, telling in pompous eulogy of the virtues of those who slept beneath, but the majority were those osser-twisted graves, which reminded us of the words in Gray's 'Elegy': 'Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap Each in his narrow cell for ever laid, The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.'

All was still save the sweet note of the cuckoo, which we heard in the distance; even the faint breeze which had hitherto prevailed was lulled