

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A DAY OF FATE.

BY REV. R. P. KOB.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

"Now suppose, for the sake of argument, that gratitude, respect, friendliness, a sense of being unprotected and alone in the world, have led to her engagement with the wealthy, middle aged banker, and that through it all her woman's heart was never awakened, such a thing at least is possible. If this were true, she would be no more to blame than I, and we might become the happy victims of circumstances. I'm not worthy of her, and never shall be, but I can't help that either. After all, it seems to me that that which should fulfil my hope is not a ledger balance of good qualities, but the magnetic sympathy of two natures that supplement each other, and were designed for each other in heaven's match-making. Even now my best hope is based on the truth that she attracts me so irresistibly, and though a much smaller body morally, I should have some corresponding attraction for her. If her woman's heart has become mine, what can she give him? Her very truth may become my most powerful ally. If she still loves him, I will go away and stay away; if it be in accordance with my trembling hope, I have the higher right, and I will assert it to the utmost extent of my power. Shall the happiness of two lives be sacrificed to his unflinching prosperity? Could it ever be right for him to lead her body to the altar, and leave her heart with me? Could she, who is truth itself, go there and perjure herself before God and man? No! a thousand times no! It has become a simple question of whom she loves, and I'll find out if Shakespeare's words are true. If she has love for me, let her bury it never so deeply, my love will be the divining rod that will inevitably discover it."

Having reached this conclusion, I at last slept, in the small hours of the night.

I thought I detected something like apprehension in her eyes when I met her in the morning. Was she conscious of a secret that might reveal itself in spite of her? But she was cheerful and decided in her manner, and seemed bent on assuring Mr. Hearn that she was well again, and all that he could desire.

Were I in mortal peril I could not have been more vigilantly on my guard. Not for the world would I permit her to know what was passing in my mind—at least not yet—and as far as possible I resumed my old manner. I even simulated more dejection than I felt, to counterbalance the flash of hope that I feared she had recognized on the previous evening.

I knew that all her woman's strength, that all her woman's pride and exalted sense of honour would bind her to him, who was serenely secure in his trust. My one hope was that her woman's heart was my ally, that it would prove the strongest; that it would so assert itself that truth and honour would at last range themselves on its side. Little did the simple, frank old Quaker realize the passionate alternations of hope and fear that I brought to his breakfast-table that bright Sunday.

All that my guarded scrutiny could gather was that Miss Warren was a little too devoted and thoughtful of her urbane lover, and that her cheerfulness lacked somewhat in spontaneity.

It was agreed at the breakfast-table that we should all go to meeting.

"Mrs. Yocomb," I said, finding her alone for a moment, "won't you be moved this morning? I need one of your sermons more than any heathen in Africa. Whatever your faith is, I believe in it, for I've seen its fruits."

"If a message is given to me I will not be silent; if not, it would be presumptuous to speak. But my prayer is that the Spirit whom we worship may speak to thee, and that thou wilt listen. Unless He speaks, my poor words would be of no avail."

"You are a mystery to me, Mrs. Yocomb, with your genial homely farm life here, and your mystical spiritual heights at the meeting-house. You seem to go from the kitchen by easy and natural transition to regions beyond the stars, and to pass without hesitancy from the companionship of us poor mortals into a presence that is to me supremely awful!"

"Thou doesn't understand, Richard. The little faith I have I take with me to the kitchen, and I'm not afraid of my Father in heaven because He is so great and I'm so little. Is Zillah afraid of her father?"

"I suppose you are right, and I admit that I don't understand, and I don't see how I could reason it out."

"God's children," she replied, "as all children, come to believe many blessed truths without the aid of reason. It was not reason that taught me my mother's love, and yet, now that I have children, it seems very reasonable. I think I learned most from what she said to me and did for me. If ever children were assured of love by their Heavenly Father, we have been; if it is possible for a human soul to be touched by loving, unselfish devotion, let him read the story of Christ."

"But, Mrs. Yocomb, I'm not one of the children."

"Yes, thee is. The trouble with thee is that thee's ashamed, or at least that thee won't acknowledge the relation, and be true to it."

"Dear Mrs. Yocomb," I cried in dismay, "I must either renounce heathenism or get away from your influence," and I left precipitately.

But in truth I was too far gone in human idolatry to think long upon her words; they lodged in my memory, however, and I trust will never lose their influence.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE OLD MEETING-HOUSE AGAIN.

Reuben and I, with Dapple, skimmed along the country roads, and my hope and spirits kindled, though I scarcely knew why. We were early at the meeting-house, and, to my joy, I gained my old seat, in which I had woven my June

day-dream around the fair unknown Quakeress whose face was now that of a loved sister. What ages, seemingly, had elapsed since that fateful day! What infinite advances in life's experiences I had made since I last sat there. How near I had come to the experiences of another life! The fact made me grave and thoughtful. And yet, if my fear and not my hope were realized, what a burden was imposed upon me with the life that disease had spared! Had I even Mrs. Yocomb's faith, I knew it would be a weight under which I would often stagger and faint.

Before very long the great family rockaway unladed its precious freight at the horse-block, and Adah and Miss Warren entered, followed by the little girls. In secret wonder I saw Adah pause before the same long, straight-backed bench or pew, and Miss Warren take the place where I had first seen my "embodiment of June." Mrs. Yocomb went quietly to her place on the high seat.

"The spell continues to work, but with an important change," I thought.

In a few moments Mr. Yocomb marshalled in Mr. Hearn, and placed him in the end of the pew next to Miss Warren on the men's side, so that they might have the satisfaction of sitting together, as if at church. He then looked around for me; but I shook my head, and would not go up higher.

Soon all the simple, plainly apparelled folk who would attend that day were in their places, and the old deep hush that I so well remembered settled down upon us. The sweet low monotone of the summer wind was playing still among the maples. I do believe that it was the same old humble-bee that darted in, still unable to overcome its innate wonder at a people who could be so quiet and serene. The sunlight flickered in here and there, and shadowy leaves moved noiselessly up and down the whitewashed wall. Only the occasional song of a bird was wanting to reproduce the former hour, but at this later season the birds seem content with calls and chirpings, and in the July heat they were almost as silent as we were.

But how weak and fanciful my June day-dream now seemed. Then woman's influence on my life was but a romantic sentiment. I had then conjured up a pretty vista full of serene, quiet domestic joys, which were to be a solace merely of my real life of toil and ambition. I had thought myself launched on a shining tide that would bear me smoothly to a quiet home anchorage; but almost the first word that Emily Warren spoke broke the spell of my complacent, indolent dream, and I awoke to the presence of an earnest, large-souled woman, who was my peer, and in many respects my superior; whom, so far from being a mere household pet, could be counsellor and friend, and a daily inspiration. Instead of shrinking from the world with which I must grapple, she already looked out upon its tangled and cruel problems with clear, intelligent, courageous eyes; single-handed she had coped with it and won from it a place and respect. And yet, with all her strength and fearlessness, she had kept her woman's heart gentle and tender. Oh, who could have better proof of this than I, who had seen her face bending over the little unconscious Zillah, and who had heard her low sob when she feared I might be dying.

The two maidens sat side by side, and I was not good enough to think of anything better or purer than they. Adah, with her face composed to its meeting-house quiet, but softened and made more beautiful by passing shades of thought; still it seemed almost as young and childlike as that of Zillah. Miss Warren's profile was less round and full, but it was more finely chiselled, and was luminous with mind. The slightly higher forehead, the more delicately arched eyebrow, the deeper setting of her dark, changing eyes, that were placed wide apart beneath the overhanging brow, the short, thin, tremulous upper lip, were all indications of the quick, informing spirit which made her face like a transparency through which her thoughts could often be guessed before spoken; and since they were good, noble, genial thoughts, they enhanced her beauty. And yet it had occurred to me more than once that if Miss Warren were a depraved woman she could give to evil a deadly fascination.

"Are her thoughts wandering like mine?" I mused. With kindling hope I saw her face grow sad, and I even imagined that her pallor increased. For a long time she looked quietly and fixedly before her, as did Adah, and then she stole a shy, hesitating glance at Mr. Hearn by her side; but the banker seemingly had found the silent meeting a trifle dull, for his eyes were heavy, and all life and animation had faded out of his full white face. Was it my imagination, or did she slightly shrink from him? In an almost instantaneous flash she turned a little more and glanced at me, and I was caught in the act of almost breathless scrutiny. A sudden red flamed in her cheeks, but not a friend of them all was more motionless than she at once became.

My conscience smote me. Though I watched for her happiness as truly as my own, the old meeting-house should have been a sanctuary even from the eyes of love. I new from the expression of her face that she had not liked it; nor did I blame her.

I was glad to have the silence of the meeting broken; for a venerable man rose slowly from the high seat and reverently enunciated the words,

"The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

"He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire."

"Be still, and know that I am God."

"The quiet, reverent bowing of the heart to His will is often the most acceptable worship that we can offer," he began, and if he had stopped there the effect would have been perfect; but he began to talk and to ramble. With a sense of deep disappointment I dreaded lest the hour should pass and that Mrs. Yocomb would not speak; but as the old gentleman sat down, that rapt look was on her face that I remembered seeing on the night of the storm. She rose, took off her deep Quaker bonnet, and laid it quietly on the seat beside her; but one saw that she was not thinking of it or of anything except the truth which filled her mind.

Clasping her hands before her she looked steadfastly toward heaven for a few moments, and then, in a low, sweet, penetrating monotone, repeated the words,

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

She paused a moment, and I gazed in wonder at her serene, uplifted face. She had spoken with such an utter absence of self-consciousness or regard for externals as to give the strong impression that the words had come again from heaven through her lips, and were endowed with a new life and richer meaning; and now she seemed waiting for whatever else might be given to her.

Could that inspired woman, who now looked as if she might have stood unabashed on the Mount of Transfiguration, be my genial, uniring nurse, and the cheery matron of the farm-house, whose deft hands had made the sweet, light bread we had eaten this morning? I had long loved her; but now, as I realized as never before the grand compass of her womanly nature, I began to reverence her. A swift glance at Miss Warren revealed that the text had awakened an interest so deep as to suggest a great and present need, for the maiden was leaning slightly toward the speaker and waiting with parted lips.

"As I sat here," Mrs. Yocomb began, looking down upon us with a grave, gentle aspect, "these words came to me as if spoken in my soul, and I am constrained to repeat them unto you. I'm impressed with the truth that peace is the chief need of the world—the chief need of every human heart. Beyond success, beyond prosperity, beyond happiness, is the need of peace—the deep, assured rest of the soul that is akin to the eternal calmness of Him who spake these words."

"The world at large is full of turmoil and trouble. The sounds of its wretched disquietude reach me even in this quiet place and at this quiet hour. I seem to hear the fierce uproar of battle; for while we are turning our thoughts up to the God of peace, misguided men are dealing death blows to their fellow men. I hear the cries of rage, I hear the groans of the dying. But sadder than these bloody fields of open strife are the dark places of cruelty. I hear the clank of the prisoner's chain, and the crack of the slave-driver's whip. I see desperate and despairing faces revealing tortured souls to whom the light of each day brings more bitter wrongs, viler indignities, until they are ready to curse God for the burden of life. Sadder still, I hear the dark whisperings of those who would destroy the innocent and cast down the simple. I hear the satanic laugh of such as are false to sacred trusts and holy obligations, who ruthlessly as swine are rending hearts that have given all the pearls they had. From that sacred place, home, come to me hot words of strife, drunken, brutal blows, and the wailing of helpless women and children. Saddest of all earthly sounds, I hear the wild revelry of those who are not the victims of evil in others, but who, while madly seeking happiness, are blotting out all hope of happiness, and who are committing that crime of crimes, the destruction of their own immortal souls. Did I say the last was the saddest of earthly sounds? There comes to me another, at which my heart sinks; it is the sound of proud, arrogant voices, 'so are explaining that faith is a delusion, that prayer is wasted breath, that the God of the Bible is a dream of old-time mystics, and that Christ died in vain. I hear the moan of Mary at the sepulchre repeated from thousands of hearts. 'They have taken away my Lord.' O God, forgive those who would blot out the dearest hope which has ever sustained humanity. Can there be peace in a world wherein we can never escape these sad, terrible, discordant sounds? The words that I have repeated were spoken in just such a world when the din of evil was at its worst, and to those who must soon suffer all the wrong that the world could inflict."

After a brief pause of silent waiting she continued:

"But is the turmoil of the world a far-away sound, like the sullen roar of angry waves beating on a shore that rises high and enduring, securing us safety and rest? Beyond the deep disquietude of the world at large is the deeper unrest of the human heart. No life can be so secluded and sheltered but that anxieties, doubts, fears, and foreboding will come with all their disturbing power. Often sorrows more bitter than death are hidden by smiling faces, and in our quiet country homes there are men and women carrying burdens that are crushing out hope and life: mothers breaking their hearts over wayward sons and daughters; wives desperate because the men who wooed them as blushing maidens have forgotten their vows, and have become swinish sots; men disheartened because the sweet-faced girls that they thought would give them a home have become vile slatterns, busybodies, shrill-tongued shrews, who banish the very thought of peace and rest, who waste their substance and eat out their hearts with care. Oh, the clouds of earth are not those which sweep across the sun, but those which rise out of unhappy hearts and evil lives. These are the clouds that gather over too many in a leaden pall, and it seems as if no light could ever break through them. There are hearts to whom life seems to promise one long, hopeless struggle to endure an incurable pain. Can there be peace for such unhappy ones? To just such human hearts were the words spoken, 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.'"

Then came one of those little pauses that were quite as impressive as the preceding words. Although my interest was almost breathless, I involuntarily looked toward one whom I now associated with every thought.

"O God!" I exclaimed mentally, "can that be the aspect of a maiden happy in her love and hope?" Her face had become almost white, and across the pallor of her cheeks tear followed tear, as from a fall and bitter fountain.

"Never, in all this evil world," the speaker resumed, "was there such cruel, bitter mockery as these words would be if they were not true—if He who spake them had no right to speak them. And what right would He have to speak them if He were merely a man among men—a part of the world which never has and never can give peace to the troubled soul? How do we know these words are true? How do we know He had a right to speak them? Thank God! I know, because He has kept His word to me. Thank God! Millions know, because He has proved His power to them. The scourged, persecuted, crucified disciples found that He was with them always, even unto the