

SONNET.

THE SHADOWY PAST.

As the eye wanders down the dark arch'd nave
Of some cathedral, sternly carved and grim,
And sees the tapered shrines, with incense dim,
Relieve in light the ponderous walls and grave;
Unnoticed and deserted are they, save
For some faint, wandering soul, flit to the brim
With quietness, who murmurs there a hymn—
So roves the mind o'er obsequious years that pave
The vaulted temple of the shadowy past.
Then, at some hushed, unseen confessional,
Veiled Memory lingers, breathing penitence:
And the bowed heart, in beauteous grieving cast
Before the altar of lost love, feels all
Be gathered power swayed to one mournful sense.

GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP.

The Professor's Darling.

AN ORIGINAL NOVEL.

CHAPTER XIX.

SLEEP IN PEACE.

The Count could not understand that Lotty should not have left a single line for him, not even one little word of farewell.

She had not time, Madame Berg told him; but that did not satisfy him.

He paused in his quick walk up and down the room; and turning the telegram, which Madame had picked up after Lotty's departure, over in his hand, read it for the tenth time at least; but derived from it no comfort, no consolation.

Lotty had vowed that very morning that she would not leave until she did so with the assurance that she was soon to return, not to Albert, but as his wife. And she had gone away in a moment, without giving one thought to the man from whom, rather than be parted, she had said that she would consent never again to see her own kith and kin.

"English girls are very strange, Cousin Lily," he said, bitterly. "And I loved her so well! What am I to do?"

"Sit down, Heinrich, and try to be quiet. I cannot speak while you walk about in such agitation. Sit down here, and listen to me."

He gloomily seated himself in the arm-chair to which she had pointed, and crushed the fatal telegram in his hand, then tore it into pieces, which he scattered over the floor.

"I shall never see her again," he said; "and I'll never trust another woman. After all that she said, to go without leaving one word for me! I cannot understand it—on my solemn word I cannot! I'll never ask her to come back—never!"

"Heinrich, I am afraid you do not know your own heart yet," said Madame, quietly.

"What do you mean?" cried the Count, indignantly. "I know it only too well. I know that she has broken it. No, that's nonsense; hearts don't break—men's hearts, at any rate. Do you really take her part, and think that I have no right to feel hurt and slighted?"

"None whatever. She was taken so completely by surprise that she had no idea what she was doing. She is a very impulsive girl, and followed the first promptings of her heart. Her brother did not even come within the hall door; he waited outside ten minutes while fresh horses were being put to the carriage. I could not ask him to remain, not knowing what dreadful trouble was awaiting him at home. Lotty had no alternative but to go with him. Consider, for one moment, Heinrich! She has told you about Elma over and over again. A fanciful dumb child, who scarcely seems to belong to this lower world, whose very affliction makes her dearer to Lotty than all the rest. Would you have kept Lotty here while her family are in trouble, and need her help and presence?"

"She never thought of me at all."

"She forgot you for the moment, I own. And was it to be wondered at? Do as you like; I have no right to dictate to you as I would to one of my own boys if he acted foolishly; but I cannot think that you will cherish ill-feeling towards Lotty. If you do, Colonel Hunter will have an easier task in opposing your marriage than he at present believes."

"Will he really hold out against it, do you think?" asked the Count, anxiously, his thoughts, for the instant, diverted to another, but scarcely a more congenial, channel.

"No; I don't think he will, when he sees that it is but a girlish fancy; and when he finds that it is something more than that, his prejudices will give way. He is too kind a father to desire to make his children miserable."

"But she has forgotten me already," sighed Heinrich, returning to the old strain. "I wonder if she will remember my existence once to-night?"

"Possibly not," answered Madame, coolly. "Elma is her sister, and will occupy the paramount place in Lotty's thoughts. But if you think on that account she has forgotten, or that she loves you less fondly than before, you know nothing of a woman's heart."

"Do you think that anything serious can have happened to Elma?" he asked, anxiously.

"I fear the worst; she is such a strange child. I am going to England to-morrow for a few days until this uncertainty is cleared up. I cannot be happy here while my friends are in such trouble. I shall take Lotty's boxes to her,

for she has left everything behind—did not even change her slippers. She had on a cloak when she came down to the door, and took up one of the hats lying on the hall-table, and was gone before I had clearly comprehended what she was doing. Gordon was very excited, but he used no words to persuade her. He never imagined that she would act otherwise than she did. She is too unselfish, too true and loyal to those whom she loves, to take her own feelings into consideration."

"I might have been entitled to a little," observed the Count, gloomily.

Madame sprang to her feet with an angry gesture, saying, "Heinrich, how unreasonable and selfish you are to-night! They say that a man in love is never quite sane. Go home and conquer your disappointment, and love Lotty all the better for giving up her own feelings and inclinations, and going home at once to share in what, for all we know, may be a heavy family sorrow. Good night; I have several household affairs to arrange, as I am going off rather suddenly. Come and see me to-morrow, and I will carry your messages to Lotty; we shall quarrel if we talk any longer just now."

The Count went out into the darkness, and crossed the park to his own gloomy tower. He had left it two hours before, brave and happy, to meet the "English brother"; he re-entered it crestfallen and disappointed, and at war with his better nature, for in his inmost heart he acknowledged that Lotty had done well, but his self-pride was touched that she could forget him even for a moment.

He did not remain long in the house—it was cheerless and desolate, so different from what it had been in the morning, when Lotty was flitting gaily through the rooms. He went out again, and paced backwards and forwards in the garden until the pale light of the stars was merged in the rosy beams of the setting sun.

Then he came to a sudden resolution.

He could not live in a state of uncertainty regarding Lotty; it would drive him half distracted. In Elma's fate he felt almost as keen an interest as she did. Why should he not also go to England?

He could be of no use to her—he would not even see her; his appearance at such a time would, he knew, be with Mrs. Hunter, an unpardonable offence; but he would be near her, and when affairs resumed their ordinary course, would go and see her father and plead his cause. Why should he not cross over with Madame Berg?

He felt happier when he had come to this decision, and going back to the house straightway set about packing a small portmanteau. That accomplished, he wrote a few business notes, and then, dressed as he was, laid down on his bed to snatch an hour's sleep before starting on his journey.

If Madame Berg was astonished when he presented himself as her escort she did not show it. She took it as a natural result.

"There is a very good hotel in the village, the 'Cuntrie Arms,'" she said; "there is no reason why you shouldn't live quietly there for a few days. I don't know about letting Lotty know, however; I shall be better able to judge of that when I see her. I trust by this time poor Elma has been found, and that she is well. In that case you can call at the Chase whenever you like; perhaps it is best that you should come with me, and await in England the course of events."

Herr von Berg expressed warmly his approval of the plan, said it was exactly what he would have done twenty years ago himself, and wished them both a pleasant journey and a speedy return.

So they started off, travelling almost in Lotty and Gordon's footsteps.

When Lotty and Gordon, after a hurried journey, arrived at the little country station, they found Bill and Tom, who had both been hastily summoned home, waiting for them. One glance at the two lads confirmed their worst fears; there was no good news—no trace of the lost child had been discovered.

"How did it all happen?" asked Gordon. "Begin at the beginning and tell us everything."

"There is scarcely anything to tell," answered Bill. "Mamma had gone out driving; Alice, as you know, was in London with papa. Mamma asked Elma to go with her, but she declined because she was busy working in her own little garden. She was using the striped wheelbarrow that you, Lotty, painted for her, to wheel away dead leaves and rubbish. She often amused herself in that way for hours. The servants were all in the house as usual, and the gardeners were going about, but no one seems to have taken any notice of her movements."

"Mamma was detained longer than she had expected, and it was quite dark before her return."

"Her first question was: 'Where is Elma?' One servant said that she was in the drawing-room, another in the nursery, and another thought she was in the library; and so on."

"For a little while mamma was quite unconcerned, expecting her to appear every instant; but, at last, old Holmes came, and told her that Elma was evidently not in the house."

"It was immediately searched from basement to garret, and the gardens and grounds were hunted over. All the lanterns in the house and in the village were brought out, and the men went over and over the woods and the park, but without discovering a trace of her."

"Mamma telegraphed first for me, being unwilling to frighten papa unless there was an ac-

tual necessity for it. I took a special train, and got here before morning. The whole countryside was searching for her by that time. I sent at once for papa, for I saw that it was serious."

"Has the lake in the park been dragged?"

"Yes, twice; but it can be done again, if you like."

"Could she have gone for a walk and strayed on to the moors, and perished with cold? Do you know what she wore?"

"In the garden she had on a white serge dress, and an ermine jacket and hat. Mamma remembers saying to her that she ought to have put on something more suitable for gardening—that she was making her dress quite black."

"She couldn't possibly have been stolen, could she?"

"No; I think not. There are no gipsies or vagrants in the neighbourhood."

"What do you think about it, Bill? I am not capable of forming an idea."

"I don't know what to think. I thought of the monastery the first thing, and—"

"Confound that old hole!" interrupted Gordon; "I will level it with the ground, and fill up the foundations before I am a month older."

"I have searched it through and through myself," continued Bill; "so has Tom, and a lot of the village men, but she isn't there."

"Are you sure that you have looked into all the old dungeons?"

"Every one of them. I thought that she might have wandered there and fallen—there are so many steps and holes in the old place—but but every crack and corner has been explored with torches."

"What is to be done?" asked Gordon, leaning heavily upon his brother's arm, for he was faint from travelling and want of sleep.

"I don't know. How tired Lotty looks! Had we not better go home? The carriage is waiting."

They had stood talking in the station, and a little sympathizing crowd had gathered at a respectful distance. An old man approached them, hat in hand, as they turned to leave, and asked,

"Any news yet, Master Bill?"

"None," answered Bill.

"The lads don't know where else to search," continued the man; "will you direct them?"

"Tell them to go over the same ground again, and search the woods thoroughly around the monastery."

"How is mamma?" asked Lotty, when they were seated in the carriage.

"Pretty well. She blames herself for not having insisted on Elma going with her. She was the last one who saw the poor child. She says if she had taken Elma with her, it would not have happened."

"Surely the servants are to blame?"

"No, I think not. No one ever looked particularly after Elma. You know how she disliked being watched. She spent a good deal of her time quite alone."

"Papa is here, of course?"

"Yes; he and Alice are both at home. He has wandered about the place night and day since he came, till he is completely knocked up."

"Have you advertised in the local paper and offered a reward?" asked Gordon, eagerly.

"Oh, yes; we have offered a thousand pounds reward for the slightest information regarding her. Not that any such incentive was needed; no one in the county, man or woman, would take the money if they found her to-morrow, but we thought it as well to offer it."

"Everything seems to have been done, and all to no end," said Gordon. "I must search myself. Alive or dead, she must be found."

The very shadow of death seemed to hang over the usually gay and cheerful house. When they entered it, Alice came to meet them, looking like a ghost.

"I am so glad that you are here, Lotty," she said, and then burst into tears. "I almost thought that you would not come after sending that telegram, and it would have broken mother's heart."

"What telegram?" asked Lotty, looking at her in amazement. "I sent no telegram, but came with Gordon at once."

If the Count had heard her, his hopes would have gone down to zero.

"Oh, I remember now!" she added quickly. "That was sent before I knew that—"

Her lips refused to finish the sentence. "Where is my mother?"

"In her own sitting-room. You had better go up at once; she is waiting for you."

Mrs. Hunter was calm and collected under the prolonged misery which she was enduring.

"My poor child!" she exclaimed, when she saw Lotty's weary, jaded appearance; "this rapid journey has half killed you. Gordon should have had some pity for you!"

"So he had; but I made him hurry on. I was in an agony to get home. Mamma, is she dead?"

For an instant, Mrs. Hunter did not speak. She folded Lotty closely in her arms, as if, once more having got her, she would never let her go again.

"Is she dead?" repeated Lotty.

"Yes," answered her mother, quietly.

"How do you know? What makes you think so?"

"I can scarcely tell. I believe that we know dreadful truths intuitively. I cannot get the monastery out of my head! She had such a fancy for going there lately, and thought a great deal about the old legend connected with it."

"I told it to her! I wish that I had bitten off my tongue first! What a wretch I was to

ever tell her such stuff! It will burden my soul all my life!"

"Hush, dear! You must not say such things. I have no foundation for my fears—quite the reverse. The place has been well searched; but I cannot think of it without shuddering. I am a little nervous these last three days, but shall feel better now that you and Gordon are safe at home."

She took off Lotty's dusty travelling things, then bringing her a dressing-gown, tried to persuade her to lie down and rest, but Lotty would not listen to the suggestion.

She went away by herself to Elma's room. There was a fire burning cheerily in the grate, and all her things were scattered about as she had left them.

A book lay in a low chair. Lotty picked it up. It was "Alice in Wonderland." A little gold paper knife with a coral handle fell from between the leaves. Lotty had sent the book to her from Wirstadt.

A scrap of crewel work, sadly drawn and botched, lay on the table; beside it a tiny silver thimble. Her miniature stew pan was on the fender; she had been attempting some new experiment in cookery that last morning.

Lotty looked at these things reverently, scarcely daring to touch one of them. Would the little dumb sister ever come back to claim her toys and treasures?

Her dainty little slippers lay on the floor where she had kicked them off, and on the window-sill was a fancy box half full of chocolate creams.

Everything was so natural and real that Lotty's hopes began to revive. Surely it was all a dream? Elma would come in directly. She was only out playing in the park.

Lotty went into her little sister's bedroom, and the first thing she saw was the scarlet dress in which Gordon had been painting Elma when Stannie and herself had arrived from Scotland.

Was the picture finished yet? she wondered. She went down-stairs and along the corridor to Gordon's studio. She knocked at the door, and receiving no answer, turned the handle and went in.

On an easel, finished and framed, stood the portrait—Elma's very self. No R.A. in England could have portrayed her more faithfully than her brother had done.

It seemed to be the living, breathing child; her cherry lips were parted in a smile, and her eyes looked searchingly at Lotty, just as they used to do when she was waiting for an answer to one of her incomprehensible questions.

On her lap lay the little slate; one small white hand grasped a pencil, the other hung down by her side. The crown of pines seemed freshly gathered from their "earthy bed," and with the dewdrops still upon their velvet leaves, rested lightly on her rough hair.

Elma's hair was never smooth five minutes after she had escaped from the trying operations of brush and comb.

Lotty stood gazing at the picture so long that Alice came at last in search of her.

"Do you like it?" Alice asked, standing beside Lotty.

"Like it! If Gordon never lifts a brush again I'll not blame him; he has painted one perfect picture, and that's enough for any man."

The gong summoning them to dinner sounded through the house while Lotty was speaking.

"Oh, Alice, how can anyone think of dinner at such a time? Are you going down? I would rather be alone here for a little while. Tell them I don't want any dinner."

Alice quietly lighted the gas-stove, for the room was cold, and went away echoing Lotty's words in her heart.

"How can anyone think of dinner at such a time?"

Come what may, the machinery of custom and regularity goes on the same. Dinners are cooked and spread before us when our hearts are breaking, and we make believe to eat them.

Darkness settled over the Chase, and one by one the searchers and the county police, whose members were energetically exerting themselves, came dropping in with some tale. They stood in little groups in the hall and in the library, talking and consulting earnestly over their next course of action.

All were glad that the young Squire had returned, for Colonel Hunter was of no use so far as advising them went, and Will could think of nothing new.

Gordon, however, when appealed to, could only shake his head, and say, "Do as you like, my friends. I can't advise you. Do as you think best; but she must be found. Have you dragged the lake again, and the river?"

"Yes," answered the men; "that has been done."

"Well, go to supper now, and we shall see what to-morrow brings us."

No one slept that night in Cuntrie Chase, unless it may have been the servants, though they shared in the universal anxiety, and a kind of subtle terror had diffused itself among them. In their number were two or three who were ignorant and superstitious, and who had hinted vaguely that the dumb child had been spirited away by superhuman agency.

Country folk are ready believers in the supernatural, and the whisper spread, and the maids, instead of going quietly to bed in their own rooms, all huddled into the house-keeper's parlour, and spoke to one another in hushed voices, and told ghost stories which would have caused stouter hearts than theirs to quake.