

HEART TO HEART; OR, LOVE'S UNERRING CHOICE.

CHAPTER VI.—(CONTINUED.)

"I would tell thee, dear, that love is a slave Who dreads thought of freedom, as life dreads the grave; And if doubt or terror of change there should be, Such fear would but drive him still closer to thee!"

"He gives, and gives all," murmured the poor girl. "Surely since those words were written no one has resigned more for love's sake than I have. In giving up Roger I have indeed given my all."

The increasing coldness of the air—now that the pale Winter sun had set behind the woods of Marham—warned Hilda that her final parting from her beloved home was fast approaching, and slowly and sorrowfully she retraced her steps through the deserted park to her own desolate apartments.

"Do you dine downstairs to-day ma'am?" asked Perkins, who was in her mistress's room when Hilda entered.

"No, thank you, Perkins," the girl answered; "take some dinner into my boudoir, and I shall not change my dress," she added, seeing that Perkins had laid a dress of costly crepe upon the sofa; "you may put that away."

"Mr. Montacute called while you were out, ma'am," said the maid, as she proceeded to obey Hilda's orders and replace the dinner dress in the wardrobe. "He seemed greatly vexed not to find you at home, and he went into your room and wrote a note; I put it on your writing table, ma'am."

Hilda made no reply, but hastily left the room to possess herself of the last letter which, in all human probability, she would ever receive from Roger Montacute. It was a brief pencil scrawl, and ran as follows:

"I am so grieved not to see you today, my darling; my aunt has given me back my ring and your cruel message, but do not think, Hilda, that I will abide by your decision. I utterly refuse to give up my promised wife, and have told Mrs. Palmer that I shall marry you at once, and we will seek a new land-sweetheart, where my strong arm, of which she cannot deprive me, shall work for and protect my wife. I shall see you early to-morrow. Ever your own, Roger."

"My dear, brave Roger," murmured Hilda, "to-morrow I shall be far away. I cannot take advantage of your generosity; I will not ruin your life," and sitting down by her writing table she wrote the following reply to his impassioned lines:

"My Dearest Roger—Your tender, loving note has touched me deeply, but it has not altered my decision. Penniless and nameless, I will not let the shadow of my evil fate fall across your path. Farewell forever, darling."

This she enclosed in an envelope, and her dinner over, rang for Perkins.

"Tell Parker to saddle my mare and ride over to the Temple with this note and Mr. Montacute," she said, giving her last order in her father's house.

"When is he to go, ma'am?" said her maid, as she took the letter.

"He can go now," rejoined her mistress, glancing at the hands of the time-piece, which pointed to half-past seven. "There is no answer, Perkins, and I shall not require you again to-night," and, bidding her mistress a respectful good-night, the maid withdrew, leaving Hilda free to complete her brief preparations for her lonely mid-night journey.

She would have to walk to the neighboring market town, a distance of five miles, in order to catch the express train to town, which stopped there at half-past nine o'clock. She had, therefore, but little time to spare. She had previously attached a strap to the travelling bag which contained her money and jewels; this she buckled round her slender waist, and putting on sealskin coat and cap, to which she added a thick crape veil, she wrapped herself warmly in the large, fur-lined carriage cloak, which had been purchased for such a far different journey, and taking the bag which contained her simple necessities in her hand, she opened the door and—her light footfall making no sound upon the thick carpet—noiselessly descended the stairs.

One solitary lamp was burning in the vast hall as she entered, which only served to make the darkness and gloom of the shadowy place more apparent; the servants were all in their own portion of the mansion, making the most of the unusual liberty and freedom which the absence of a master and mistress enabled them to enjoy. A bright light streaming from under the closed door of a small study, where Mr. Wilmot was sitting, was the only sign of life perceptible in the great house so lately blazing with light, thronged with servants and filled with gay company. Trembling so excessively that she could hardly stand, Hilda with difficulty unbarred the heavy hall door, and, stepping out, softly closed it behind her. As the great bar was shot into its place with a dreary clang and Hilda stood outside under the brilliant, frosty stars of that Winter night, she realized for the first time the magnitude of the step she was taking, and knew that she was "out in the cold world," homeless, friendless, with the door of her only refuge closed behind her.

CHAPTER VII.

FALLEN AMONG THIEVES.

While her life lasted Hilda could never recall without a shudder the events of that night, when she fled from her home, leaving all hope, all happiness, behind. The memory of that night recurring to her in her happiest hours had power to cause her a pang of agony, such as one experiences when some careless finger is laid upon a half-healed wound.

When she had left the park and struck out into the high road she walked rapidly along through the woods of Marham, where she had so often rambled in the days that were no more; along the hard, white

road, and on, till the lights of the little market town trembled in the keen, frosty air. The station was reached, and, cold and tired, Hilda was glad to gain its welcome shelter. Looking at the clock, the weary girl discovered that she had fully half an hour to wait before the arrival of the up express.

A porter who was standing about on the lookout for a job perceived her and came forward to relieve her of her bag. He was a stranger to Hilda, so she asked him to get her a cup of tea, and turning into the waiting-room sat down before the splendid fire which blazed in the grate. The porter brought her the tea and a bath bun, and while she sipped the refreshing beverage the man offered to get her ticket, the booking office being open. At last with a rush and a roar the express train steamed on to the platform, and Hilda, having liberally fed the obliging porter, was soon seated in a first class carriage, speeding through the cold, frosty night on the first step of her unknown journey.

In less than an hour the Paddington terminus was reached, and feeling, oh so lonely and weary, Hilda left the carriage and mingled with the stream of eager passengers, all clamoring for their luggage.

The Christmas holidays were just over and the station was crowded. Hilda was pushed and jostled to and fro, and, feeling very lonely and helpless and forlorn, she sat down on a bench to wait until the bustle should have subsided and she could find a porter to answer her inquiries as to where she could procure a lodging for the night. As she sat, weary and dispirited upon the bench on the great draughty platform, her lovely, pale face, framed in its rich masses of gleaming hair and her exquisite, misty eyes filled with tears, caught the attention of a lady who was passing, and who, after pausing for a moment and attentively regarding the tired figure of the young girl clad in her deep mourning and rich, dark furs, advanced, and in a pleasant, gentle voice asked if she was waiting for a friend.

Hilda raised her head and saw before her a tall, fine-looking woman, handsomely dressed in black, her velvet jacket deeply bordered with sable, and a most becoming bonnet of black velvet with azure plumes shading her comely face and silvery hair. The kindly voice and genial manner cheered the girl's drooping spirits, and she answered:

"No, madam, I have no friends in London; I am quite alone."

"Then what are you doing here, poor child, alone at this late hour?" asked the lady and Hilda replied:

"I have lost my father and have had to leave my home. I am only waiting to ask a porter to direct me to some hotel where I can pass the night."

"My poor child," replied the lady, "you are too young and pretty to be left to your own devices; come home with me to-night, and to-morrow I can, I dare say, aid you in finding some respectable apartments."

Guileless, innocent Hilda, lifted her tired eyes to the friendly face that was looking down at her, agreed to the stranger's proposal, and, leaving the crowded station, the lady signalled to a hansom and they were soon rapidly driven down the lamp-lit street.

"And what made you come to London, my dear?" her new acquaintance asked Hilda. And the young girl replied:

"I wish to obtain a governess's situation. I have had an excellent education, and I have plenty of money to support myself until I hear of something to suit me."

"Where is your baggage," asked her new friend.

"I have brought nothing with me except this bag," replied the girl, blushing deeply.

"I have my money and jewels here," touching as she spoke the dressing bag in which she had deposited all her valuables. "I can send for my heavy luggage as soon as I hear of a situation."

Further conversation was stopped by the arrival of the hansom at the door of a pretty semi-detached villa, and the strange lady dismounted from the vehicle and opening the door with her latch-key bade the tired, worn-out girl a hearty welcome.

"Come in here, my dear," she said kindly, as she opened the door of a prettily furnished sitting-room at the back of the house. The apartment was bright with fire and gaslight, and in a low chair by the hearth was a tall, slight woman dressed handsomely in a rustling silk of a dark wine color, her hair elaborately dressed above a tired, worn face which once must have been eminently lovely, but which now bore an expression of nearly self-contempt which too plainly betokened an aching heart. Her deep, brilliant eyes scanned Hilda's face attentively as she rose to bid her welcome.

"This is my niece, Geraldine Gray," said the handsome hostess. "Will you get this poor child some tea, love? She is quite exhausted." Then, turning to Hilda, she said: "My daughters are at the theatre to-night, and sup afterward at a friend's house. They will not be home until late, and we never keep the servants up."

"Pray do not take any trouble for me," answered Hilda; "indeed there is no occasion," she added, as Miss Gray rose to leave the room. "A good night's rest is all I require."

"Oh nonsense, my dear," responded her hostess good humoredly. "Do you think we Londoners are so inhospitable as that? A good cup of tea will refresh you, and I should advise a spoonful of brandy to prevent your taking cold."

"The tea will be very welcome, but no brandy, thanks," replied Hilda. "I never like spirits and have a distracting headache."

The door at that moment opened, admitting Miss Gray, who carried a little tray with a dainty tea laid upon it. But Hilda could not eat, though the cold chicken and delicate slices of bread and butter looked most tempting, and was glad to follow her hostess to the pretty bedroom prepared for her.

Bidding her new acquaintance a grateful good night, Hilda soon laid her aching head upon the pillow, and worn out by the fatigue and excitement of the day, she slept profoundly.

So sound indeed was her slumber that she did not hear the gentle footfall of her hostess, as clad in dressing gown and

slippers, she noiselessly entered Hilda's room, and after looking for some time at the lovely girl as she lay sleeping profoundly, her golden hair scattered over the pillow, she took something from the dressing table and withdrew as noiselessly as she had entered.

How long Hilda had slept she knew not, when she was roused from her feverish slumbers by a bright light shining in her eyes. Hastily rising from her pillow, she beheld Miss Gray bending over her.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed the girl, as she noticed that Miss Gray's face was very pale.

"Hush!" replied Geraldine hastily; "rise and dress, and I will tell you."

"But what is it?" said Hilda, hardly awake yet, but rising, nevertheless, and beginning to put on her clothes.

"You must dress and flee from this accursed house at once!" replied the other.

"Child, you do not guess half the evil to which every moment you remain here exposes you?"

"Why, then, do you stay?" asked Hilda, frightened by Miss Gray's words and manner.

"Why do I stay?" says the latter, with a bitter laugh. "Because I have no other home. Ah, would to heaven some hand had been outstretched to save me when I entered these evil doors!"

"But I do not understand," said Hilda, terrified, she scarcely knew why, by Geraldine's mysterious words.

"My poor girl!" said the elder woman, laying her hand very tenderly on the other's arm, "this house hides many evil deeds, of which I dare not tell you; but as you value your peace and happiness, go at once before the day breaks."

"I am going," sobbed the poor girl, as with trembling fingers she buttoned her heavy mourning dress. "I know you mean kindly, but oh! where can I go at this time of night, too?"

Miss Gray stopped in her occupation of hastily packing Hilda's few things, and, turning to the frightened girl, said gravely:

"If you had to pass the night in the workhouse—say, even wander about till morning without a place to lay your head, I should still urge you to leave this roof at once; but if you go a short distance you will reach the police station. There you will find some one who will find you a night's lodging. You have money?" she asked.

And Hilda, putting her hand in her pocket, produced her purse—a dainty toy of pearl and silver—in which she had placed ten sovereigns before setting out on her journey.

"I have plenty here for the present," said the girl, "and have also a large sum of money, besides some valuable jewels in my dressing bag," turning to the dressing table, where she had deposited it when she went to bed. But it was no longer there!

"Where on earth is it?" cried Hilda, nervously, as she looked about the room, but nowhere could she discover her missing treasures. "Oh, Heavens! what shall I do?" she exclaimed in despair.

"You have been robbed, poor child," said the woman. "Did I not tell you this was a cursed house?" And then, as Hilda stood white and trembling before her, she added, passionately: "It is my aunt who has taken your jewels and money, but do not stay to search for it; it would be useless."

And Hilda, quite broken down by this last calamity, slowly and sadly stole down the dimly lighted staircase, behind the woman who had rescued her.

The servant opened the hall door, and as she did so a gust of wind blew the fast-falling snow into the house. Hilda shivered with cold and fear as she glanced into the snowy street. Sobbing bitterly, the poor girl descended the steps out into the pitiless cold and heavy falling snow of the Winter night.

The street was quite deserted when Hilda reached the slippery pavement, and, tired and exhausted as she was, she found it well-nigh impossible to struggle on, unnumbered as she was with her heavy cloak and long, crape-trimmed skirt, to say nothing of the bag she carried. After wandering for some time, vainly seeking to find the police station to which the woman had directed her, she could go no longer, but sank down upon the stone steps in the shade of the portico of a large building, which, though she knew it not, was one of London's famous hospitals.

The sufferings of the unhappy Hilda would soon have been over had it not been that rescue was at hand. A cab drew up at the portal of the hospital, and the caddy, assisted by another man, lifted from it the figure of a wretched woman beaten almost to death by her brutal husband. When she had been tenderly carried into the accident ward the young man who had brought her in, in descending the steps, spied the body of Hilda as she lay huddled up against a pillar. His hasty exclamation of surprise brought the cabman to his aid, and between them the inanimate body of the poor girl was raised from its snowy bed and borne into the hospital.

And before morning the idolized daughter of Mark Deloraine was tossing from side to side upon her bed in the fever ward, raving in all the delirious agonies of brain fever.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMEbody's DARLING.

It would be impossible to describe the consternation felt by all the inhabitants of the Abbey when the flight of Hilda was discovered. When Perkins entered her mistress's room on the morning succeeding the day on which the poor, friendless girl had so foolishly quitted her only shelter she perceived at once that something unusual had happened. The room was in disorder, the bed exactly in the same state as it had been when she had left her mistress the preceding evening, and the clusters of wax lights on toilet and mantelpiece burned down into their sockets.

Perkins, in dismay, hastily left the room to summon the housekeeper, and the news of the flight of their former mistress soon spread through the house.

Hilda's own groom hastily saddled a horse and, without waiting for any orders, galloped off to the Temple, where, it is needless to say, he found Roger Montacute ready enough to accompany him to the Abby and join in the search for the missing Hilda. Mr. Wilmot had already dispatched a telegram to Nigel Wentworth, informing him of the young lady's flight and requesting his presence at the Abbey.

It was with feelings of rage and grief almost too deep for utterance that Roger entered the home of his lost darling and

stood in her deserted apartments. Perkins could give him no comfort when he questioned her again and again as to the reason of Hilda's flight. The waiting-maid was dissolved in tears and disposed to take the gloomiest view of the affair.

"Oh, sir," she cried repeatedly, "I wish I had not left her alone last night; there was a wildness in her eyes I did not like, but says she, 'Perkins,' says she, 'I shall not require you any more to-night.' You know, sir, she would always have her own way, would my poor mistress. Oh, sir! what if my poor, dear lady 'ave a bin and gone and drowned herself from Perkins, and Roger interrupted her impatiently.

"For Heaven's sake, Perkins, don't talk in that horrid manner; what should Miss Deloraine make away with herself for?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir," snuffed the offended damsel, "I'm only a servant, and as such, of course, can't be expected to know much about my betters, but I can and will say as my poor, dear young lady, had never seemed like herself since her pa died, and I'm sure she was crying in her room for hours upon hours yesterday after Mrs. Palmer had been and showed her up so, poor young lady!"

Roger turned very red and muttered, between his teeth, something that was not a benediction on thus hearing that his aunt's visit and her treatment of Hilda had become the common property of the servants' hall.

To turn the conversation he asked Perkins if she knew when her mistress had left the house, and whether she had taken anything with her.

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir, what my mistress took. I've been that hurried over since I found that her bed had not been slept in that you might knock me down with a feather; you might, indeed, sir," said Perkins, assuming a die away air, and looking at the young man as if inviting him to make the attempt.

"Well, Perkins, suppose you look over her things," said poor Roger, with a break in his kind, manly voice as he spoke; and, going over to the window, he stood leaning against the frame and gazing over the exquisite expanse of wood and water, fertile meadow and undulating hills, upon which his darling's glad eyes had so often gazed, and upon which but yesterday she had taken her last look, when with the bitterness of death in her heart she had exited herself for his sake from all she loved. And Roger swore an oath to himself as he stood there that he would seek and, if possible, find the woman he so devotedly loved, and far from all those scenes which were fraught with so much pain for both of them, he would work for his Hilda, happier in the possession of her steadfast love than with all his aunt's hoarded thousands. A hasty explanation from Perkins startled him from his reverie, and with one stride he turned and reached the wardrobe, by the open doors of which the waiting-maid was standing.

"What is it, Perkins? What have you found?" asked the young man, who had turned white to the very lips.

"Look here, sir," replied the maid, pointing to a shelf in the wardrobe, upon which were piled Morocco cases of every shape and color. "My poor mistress has been and left all her beautiful wedding presents! Oh, Lord of mercy, whatever she should be doing that for, unless she was going to put an end to her poor self!"

And Perkins, moved to a fresh burst of grief at the dismal picture she had conjured up, broke into fresh sobs.

"Do be quiet, Perkins," replied the young man, better able than the lady's maid to appreciate the delicacy of mind which made it impossible for Hilda to retain the costly gifts that had been offered by himself and their many friends on the occasion of the marriage of Mark Deloraine's heiress.

"Has she taken no clothes with her?" he asked, as Perkins, fidgeted over her mistress's drawers and wardrobes.

"No, poor lady! Nothing but what she stood upright in except her fur coat and the big cloak her pa sent for from Russia. How could she carry anything with her?" she asked.

And Roger only replied by a bitter sigh. His lovely, tenderly reared darling wandering through the Winter night alone and unprotected! The thought stung him to madness, and he exclaimed:

"What on earth are we to do, Perkins? Oh, Heavens! I wish Wentworth were here!"

"She has took her own jewels, sir," said Perkins, returning at length from the survey of her mistress's things. "And I know she has plenty of money, so perhaps she'll be all right," she added. "Leastways, if she don't get robbed and murdered for the sake of her jewels. We do hear such shocking things nowadays, I'm sure the things as Mr. Mason reads us in 'the room,' out of the Police News, is enough to make one's blood all of a curdle!"

But Perkins's cheerful surmises were addressed to the empty air, for Roger had left the room to consult Mr. Wilmot as to the best plan to be pursued to obtain intelligence of the missing girl. Before long Nigel Wentworth arrived from town to join in their consultations, and telegrams were dispatched to the different stations along the line, and also to Scotland Yard, requesting the services of a skilled detective; but all to no purpose. The week wore away and there were no tidings of the lost Hilda. Strange to say, no one had observed her at the station, and the porter, remembering the half sovereign with which Hilda had "tipped" him, preserved a discreet silence on the subject of the lovely golden-haired passenger by the 8:30 express.

Meanwhile the subject of all this anxiety was lying upon her narrow bed in the whitewashed ward of the hospital at whose doors she had fallen down senseless on that fatal night of her arrival in London. Her recovery was for a long time extremely doubtful. The anguish she had endured at her father's awful death, the discovery of the secret of her birth, the breaking off of her engagement with Roger Montacute, were amply sufficient to cause the brain fever which had struck her down, and when to all these causes were added the dreadful events of the first night in London and the exposure to cold of the snowy streets, it will not be wondered at that the skilled physicians and the trained nurses who surrounded Hilda's bed shook their heads gravely and were more than doubtful of the result of the battle fought between the exhausted sufferer and the rider of the Pale Horse.

They had tried in vain to discover any

clue to Hilda's friends. The exquisitely fine lace-trimmed linen, which she wore as well as that contained in her traveling bag, bore the same monogram, elaborately embroidered in satin stitch, that was emblazoned in pearls and pink coral upon her sealskin jacket; her heavy crape skirt was rent and torn and wet with the snow, through which she had waded in her flight through the midnight streets. What had brought her to such a terrible pass? The doctors vainly asked each other as they examined their unconscious patient. Not poverty, they agreed. Her purse contained nearly £10, her watch and chain was a costly toy of blue enamel set with diamonds, and two diamond rings glittered upon the finger of one white hand. Well, they must wait in patience until she recovered her reason before they could hope to find the key to this strange enigma.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

DEMAND FOR THE BIBLE.

NO OTHER BOOK THAT IS ABLE TO COMPETE WITH IT.

Two Hundred Million Copies of the English Word in Circulation—Its Value Emphasized by Its Critics.

There is an article in the current issue of The London Quarterly Review giving facts and figures to show that never before has there been so great a demand for the Bible as there is to-day. In England alone about 3,000,000 copies are issued every year. In nearly every other civilized country the circulation of the Bible is simply enormous, and at the present moment there are more than 200,000,000 copies of the book in circulation in 330 different languages, while the demand for it is

INCREASING ALL THE TIME.

The story told by these statistics is impressive enough, but perhaps the remarkable interest now manifested in all questions relating to the Bible is even more suggestive, says the New York Tribune. So many books about the Bible are constantly appearing that it is impossible to keep track of them. And the demand for good books on the subject is still unabated. Doubtless this interest is due in part to the investigations of the new school of so-called higher critics, and it is therefore critical rather than spiritual. But, however that may be, that fact still remains that there is no other book in the world that is able to compete with the Bible in the interest, if not the affection, of men. Timid Christians, it is true, are alarmed at the growth of the critical school of Biblical scholars, but unless the Bible held

A SUPREMACY AND UNIQUE PLACE

in the thought of the world, no critics would think it worth while to get at its meaning, or if they did the great mass of intelligent readers wouldn't care a button what they said.

Col. Ingersoll or John L. Sullivan can easily fill a big hall, largely, we suspect, with the same class of people; that is a fact the importance of which we would by no means underestimate. But while two or three thousand people are yelling with delight over the "mistakes of Moses," or the ease with which the "big fellow" can still go through the dumb show of fighting multitudes of earnest and intelligent men and women in every walk of life are pondering over the message of

THE BOOK OF BOOKS,

and, however, imperfectly, are trying to order their lives according to its moral precepts. The present day critical investigation of the Bible may in some respects modify or change the popular conception of it. Indeed, it has done so in a measure already, but in so far as we can see it has in no degree weakened the hold of the Bible on the conscience of Christendom. Nor is there the faintest sign that modern civilization intends to part with any of the essential principles and ideals which it has learned from that venerable book. Possibly Moses may have made mistakes; he is great enough to do so. But no mistake he ever made compares with that of those who think to elevate and ennoble the world by spitting "the ears of the groundlings" with coarse sneers at religion and the Bible.

New Way to Gain Time.

John was a dull boy at his books, and although almost nine years old had difficulty in spelling very short and easy words. But now and then he showed a gleam of something like intelligence.

One day a younger scholar asked teacher how to spell "hail."

By a coincidence another child presently wanted to know how to spell "tare."

What kind of "tare" do you mean? the teacher inquired.

That afternoon in the spelling-class the teacher asked John to spell "slate!"

John did not remember, but he disliked to say so.

What kind of slate do you mean? he asked, with a very innocent drawl.

Would Take No Risks.

The insurance agent stepped briskly up to the Dutch saloon keeper.

Want your life insured?
Nup.
Your brother's?
Nup.
Your wife's?
Fer what?
So when she dies you get the money.
Uf I insuret my house unt it burnt up dey buy me anuder. Now if Katrina dies dey buys me anuder vife. Nuh, I keep my Katrina.

Pleasant Prospect.

Neighbor—I hear that your master has married again and is taking a bride for you. Uncle Mose—Don't know bout him takin' a bride to dis one, boss, but he do want a paddle to his first wife, shure.