

childhood. The old wound seemed to open afresh, and I determined to stay in Montreal. I managed to obtain my discharge, and have remained in this city nearly ever since. On the death of my youngest brother, some seven years ago, I had to go to England, but remained there only long enough to settle my affairs, when I again sailed for Canada. I now come to a part of my narrative which is of especial interest to you. We arrived safely at Quebec, after a very pleasant run, and as I had some friends in the Ancient Capital, I made up my mind to stay there a few days before proceeding to Montreal. I had just reached the house of a physician with whom I was well acquainted, and was in the act of taking off my coat, when a ring came to the bell, and a messenger hurriedly asked for the doctor, saying there had been a terrible accident and that three men were either dead or dying. My friend not being at home, I told the messenger to lead the way and I would go with him. On arriving at the hospital a ghastly sight met my gaze. A large boulder from one of the cliffs had fallen, crushing three men into an almost unrecognizable mass. A glance sufficed to show me that two of them were dead, but the other still breathed, although he was fast sinking. I looked at him, took his trembling hand in mine, and felt his dying pulse. And while I gazed I seemed to remember something in the man's features. But his lips move. He tries to speak. I bend down and listen: "Paper—pencil!" was all I could catch. I gave him the desired articles, and he wrote, my hand guiding his:

"To my much wronged wife—
I am dying. Forgive me."
—SORLOFF—

"That was all. He was dead."
"Sorloff, my husband, was it he?" cried Emily, starting up.

"Yes, it was Count Sorloff, the man who had wrecked my happiness. I did not know it then, but thought only of him as one I had known in former years. I pitied his untimely end, and after making enquiries about him, found that he had been stopping for some weeks at one of the second-class hotels of the city. Nobody seemed to know anything about him, and I had him buried in Mount Hermon, and placed a stone over his grave bearing the inscription: "Sorloff." Nothing more. This is my story. I have remained in Montreal ever since, doing what I can to help the poor, and had to a degree become reconciled to my life, till last night. But—"

"The last words of Sorloff," interrupted Emily. "You have them still?"

"Yes, and will give them to you."
I rose, crossed over to my cabinet, and from a private drawer, drew out an envelope labelled "Sorloff," and taking it to Emily handed it to her.

She took the little sheet of paper from the envelope, read it over, her eyes brimming with tears, and holding out her hand to me said:

"Forgive him. He has sinned against both of us, but let us forgive him. I was more to blame than he, and if you can, in your heart, forgive the living, surely you cannot withhold forgiveness from the dead!"

"I forgive him with all my heart," I said, taking her poor thin hand in mine, and again a feeling of content seems to come over me, and the words of the Christmas carol once more sound in my ears:

"Good-will henceforth from heaven to men
Begin and never cease."

IV.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

Another Christmas Eve. But how different the scene! Many changes have taken place since my adventure on St. Mary street, Montreal, a year ago.

After the finding of Emily, a longing to see my old home took possession of me, and I had not much difficulty in inducing both her and little Nellie to accompany me across the ocean.

Back once more, amid the old familiar scenes, Emily rapidly recovered her health, and now, a year having passed, she was scarcely to be recognized as the one I had saved from the point of death.

Is it any wonder, then, that my love should have returned in all its intensity, and that I should still wish to claim as wife the woman who left me twenty-six years ago?

No! emphatically no, for my love had never died, and Emily, although carried away by a girlish fancy, had loved me all the while, and had bitterly repented her rash act—an act that had well-nigh cost her her life.

It was my wish that we should be united on the anniversary of her disappearance—and although many changes had taken place in the interval—many familiar faces had disappeared—still we were now happy in our love—a love that was mingled with regret and repentance.

But the hour is drawing near—the guests have arrived—I hasten to the drawing-room, take my place beside the only woman I have ever loved—the words are said—she places her hand in mine—I place the ring upon her finger—the benediction is pronounced—I salute my bride. Mine, at last, forever.

And the glorious Christmas Carol is chanted forth—a song of triumph:

"All glory be to God on high,
And in the earth be peace,
Good-will henceforth from heaven to men,
Begin and never cease."

THE SILVER HORSE-SHOE.

I.

We had been so sure that the troubles that were overwhelming others in the manufacturing world would never touch us! We had been so sure that the delegates from the unions might prattle about among our "hands," and never gain one single adherent!

I thought our safety founded on a rock. I thought we could calmly and sympathizingly look down upon the troubles of our neighbours.

Now, when I say "we," I mean John and I. This sounds "strong-minded," you are ready to say.

Well, I don't know what other people may choose to call it, but in truth I have been very proud and glad that ever since the day I married the owner of Otway mills he has liked me to take an interest in his work and in his people.

I don't mean to say that he talks to me about the price of yarns, or tells me of the rises and falls in the cotton market, though I think that if any great anxiety came upon him, even of that kind, Jack would give me a hint of it, and I'm sure I should try my best to look as wise as a young owl, and as if the ins and outs of the trade were familiar subjects to my inquiring and enlightened mind.

You see I have had such an example in John's mother; and then—well, my family thought that I ought to have done better than marry a Lancashire mill-owner, and they said a good many bitter things. Aunt Denison used to give her shoulders the least little shrug, and draw her shawl about her as if she shivered slightly when I alluded to my future home; and when she shook hands with John, she always managed to convey to me an affected misgiving that she rather feared her delicate fingers might be soiled by the contact. These things hurt at the time; though they lost their sting quickly enough when I got him all to myself, and he held me close in his arms, and told me how hard he would strive to make me happy. Happy! we I, well, I wonder does there live a happier woman than John's wife in all the length and breadth of England? Yet no life is without its days of trial, and the story I am going to tell you now is of one of those dark times that come to us all sooner or later.

The way that Aunt Denison and others of my own kith and kin behaved about my marriage naturally put me somewhat "out in the cold" with them and threw me more completely upon John's people than might have been the case otherwise. And how good they were to me!

I had never seen Mrs. Ralph Otway, John's mother, until I came to the land of smoke and tall chimneys, for she had not come south to our wedding. Her delicate health was the excuse put forward, but my own private opinion is that John was afraid of auntie. He could put up calmly enough with that shiver and shrug when directed against himself; but both he and I had once inadvertently heard her say that "she believed all Lancashire ladies spoke in a loud voice, and had very red hands," and I think that was enough for John.

When I first saw Mrs. Ralph Otway this saying at once darted into my mind, for never, among all the grand London ladies that visited at my guardian's house, had I ever seen a woman so completely, beautiful yet refined in look, voice and manner. Then her hands! Why, they were such soft, white, womanly things, and closed over one's own with such a tender, faithful clasp, that once, sitting by her knee, I could not help bending down and kissing them as they lay upon her lap.

She used to tell me stories of Jack's boyish days; stories that she never tired of telling, or of listening to; and sometimes she spoke of her dead husband, and of how he had been revered and looked up to by everybody, until at last his name became a sort of proverb, and people in the business world had been heard to speak of him as "honourable Ralph Otway." You could hear a tremor in her voice when she spoke of things like these, and see a faint flush like the pink in the inner side of a sea-shell, rise to her delicate cheek.

"It is a great responsibility to have so many hands under one head, and to be answerable for the welfare of them all; it needs wisdom to rule them well, and to be just as well as kind," she would say to me, speaking of the great mills where the machinery whirled and buzzed all day long, and the "hands" came rushing out when the dinner-bell clanged its noisy summons, like bees swarming from their hive. Listening to her wise and tender words, it was borne in upon me that from his early boyhood John had been trained in the best school to make a man good and true.

He had wanted his mother to live with us—and you may be sure I had no will apart from his—but she said: "No; married folks are best left to themselves." She had her way; but we would not let her go far from us; only a "step or two," as John said, so that we could run across of an evening, and she could come to us without fatigue.

By the end of the first year of my married life I seemed to have forgotten the fact of being a south-country woman. I found that there were plenty of art-lovers and music-lovers among the people whom Aunt Denison once told me went into society with little fluffy bits of cotton sticking to their dress-coats; while, as for honest warmth of heart, and true, ungrudging hospitality, I soon came to the conclusion that the South couldn't hold a candle to the North.

I was very happy during that strange new year; happier still during the one that followed, when I held John's son in my arms and saw the clear gray eyes that had won my girlish heart look up at me from my lap.

At first, motherhood seemed to me such a sweet, new, precious joy that I was ready to be over-anxious. I might have fallen into the mistake that so many wives make, and in my love for baby let the even dearer possession of my husband's companionship slip from my hold. However dearly a man loves his children he does not want to be always hearing about them, least of all when he comes home tired with the day's work; nor yet does he like to see his wife gradually become little better than a nursemaid. I know all these things now; but in those early days I might have lost the freshness of John's sympathy for me, and mine for him, if it had not been for the gentle word in season that fell from his mother's lips, and made, as it were, scales to fall from my eyes.

She spoke with her hand on my shoulder, and her dear beautiful face all a-quiver in the dread lest I should be ready to resent her counsel.

"Don't let baby keep you from being the heart of John's life, child," she said. "Let no one ever have the power of taking that from you."

Then I remembered how the night before I had been chattering away about baby's remarkable feats and marvellous doings, and how weary John had looked—nay, how I had caught him in the loving hiding away of a yawn that would not be wholly repressed, and wisdom came to me as I pondered.

Times were bad; trouble was around us everywhere in the mercantile world; evil counsel was leading honest men astray, and wanton hands were sowing the seeds of dissatisfaction in the hope of reaping harvests of advantage to themselves. First one class of operatives went on a strike, and then another. The "hands" at this mill or that refused to go on working except under the spur of higher wages, and so the busy whirl-whirr of the machinery was silent until strange hands could be found to set it going again.

Darker shadows crept into the picture after this; men, an hour ago hale and hearty, were maimed, blinded, beaten almost out of life; and these crimes were done in the dark. The masters did not escape; one was fired at—the cowardly bullet coming from no one knew whither. I grew fearful, and in spite of struggles after courage, more than once I had to turn away my head after John's good-bye kiss had pressed my lips, as he set off for Otway mills.

Our hands seemed all right as yet.

Yet I saw, day by day, how the cloud deepened on my husband's face. I used to sit very quiet, just within reach of his hand, of an evening, or we would stroll down to Mrs. Otway's—John very quiet, but yet I knew, by the magnetism of touch, happy in the feeling of my hand resting on his arm. The mother and son spoke earnestly together of the state of trade, and the dark mists hanging over the north country, and well typified by the black smoke that came from the big chimneys and hung like a canopy above the town.

Who shall tell of the tribute paid in pain and tears by the women and children in those troublous days! Surely no bitterer pang there can be than the sharp stab that goes through a mother's heart as the cry of her child for "Bread! bread!" has to be smothered against her breast, lest its sound drive the brooding man by the fireless hearth to madness and violence.

This is what being "on strike" means to the wives and little ones of our mill hands. I say "our" because—alas! that I should have to write it—the day came when John returned from town looking as I had never seen him—as the mother who bore him had never seen him.

Otway mills were stopped. The men, whose relations with their masters had been a proverb in the trade, were on a strike.

John did not say much. He was never a man of many words, and silence is natural to men as a refuge from possible tears.

"Our turn has come at last; it is hardly the men's fault; this sort of thing is as catching as the plague. They know they have been fairly dealt with. That blackguard Jim Stevens is at the bottom of it; he was seen talking to one of the delegates from the union."

That was all John said. His mother and I listened; and noting the set line of his lips, and the stern look in his eyes, we knew that, let the men of Otway mills be as stubborn as they might, the master would not yield an inch.

Our home, the dearest spot on earth to me—the fairest, too, in spite of its nearness to a manufacturing centre—was some three miles out of the town.

John used generally to drive in and out, to and from the mills, but sometimes he rode his big black horse, King Cole, and now and again I would ride by him on my pretty little bay mare, Lassie, returning with the groom.

Well, the night after he told me of the strike, I lay wide-eyed through all the long, long hours, hearing each one strike below stairs, and thinking those thoughts of mingled love and fear that gather about a woman's heart like a flock of ill-omened birds when her nearest and dearest are threatened with danger. The stillness of night is a terrible magnifying medium; possibilities take gigantic proportions seen through its voiceless quiet. How glad I was when faint lines of light began to creep into the room!

It was past—that night of thoughts that were almost prayers—and prayers that were only like

thoughts that I trusted God to read the meaning of.

Breakfast over, the passionate protest in my heart bubbled up to my lips, like a spring that must well up to the light.

"Jack! oh, Jack! you will not go to the mills to-day!"

The answer came, calm and clear, smiting me with a bitter despair.

"I do not think my wife would try to make a coward of me."

He did not speak harshly. I could have borne it better if he had.

He kissed me a moment after—held me very fast and close—then, before he went, he kissed me again.

"That is for the youngster upstairs," he said, with a tender smile softening the set look of his mouth; "give it him when he wakes."

The groom, an old and faithful servant of the Otways, looked grave as he led up King Cole and gave the bridle into his master's hand. Then John rode away and I went into the house, seeing nothing clearly for the mist that gathered round me, not even the baby's face, as nurse met me with him at the foot of the stairs.

That night and morning formed the initial letter of a time of anxious foreboding that seemed long to me, though in reality its duration was scarcely a fortnight.

Threatening letters—missives of that most cowardly character called anonymous—came at intervals. Many husbands would have hidden such things from a wife, but I think that John knew that of all trials I could have least endured the thought that he kept a trouble from me.

Mrs. Otway's face grew pallid with a more transparent whiteness every day; her eyes, always tearless, had a fixed hard look, the look that comes from grief restrained from outward show by might or will.

At length, negotiations for the employment of alien "hands"—men willing to work for the wages that was all the masters could give in those biting times—were spoken of. Wrath that had simmered now seethed; scowling men gathered in groups about the narrow streets that surrounded the mills like a labyrinth; muttered curses made starved and frightened women hurry by; clenched fists threatened the world for grievances brought about by the bad counsel of wicked men and the brute resolve and stubbornness of uncultured natures.

Many cases of low fever, the result of insufficient food and fuel, occurred among the wives and children of our rebellious operatives, and my time was soon taken up by ministering to the necessities of the sick. In this work John never strove to hinder me; nor yet, in the wretched homes of the people, was one word of reference to the strike ever uttered in my hearing. The people were kindly, and grateful to me in their own rough way, and I crossed no threshold that a welcome did not greet me.

God knows how full my heart was in those days of darkness! He was teaching me the deepest lessons of life, for "in the day of my sorrow I sought the Lord." Not with long prayers, or any outward acts of devotion, but with a close dependence on His care that became as the very air I breathed. Nor was I without comfort. The sympathy of those dependent upon us is a beautiful thing in time of trouble—and there was not a servant in our household whose heart did not beat in sympathy with mine; no one who did not rejoice with me in the safe return of the master evening by evening, and enter into my repressed anxiety as we saw him ride away in the morning.

At length came a day—one of those days that are to be found in most lives—a day that, however long we live, however far away from its scenes our after fate may drift us, is traced upon our memories in indelible colours, and forms a picture upon which we turn and look back, to marvel again and again how we lived through its horror and its anguish.

II.

It was the Christmas-tide, and the days were the shortest of the year. I love the gloaming, and was not sorry to welcome the soft dusk a wee bit earlier each day. Baby liked it, too, I think; for twilight makes idle fingers, and I had more time to toss him up and down and listen to the merry music of his crows of pleasure. However sad and anxious at other times, I always managed to cheer up when baby made his appearance in my sitting-room; and, oh, what comfort I found in the touch of his velvet-soft cheek cuddled up against mine, and his little pink-palmed hands clinging round my finger!

Well, one day, or rather afternoon, as the shadows were lengthening out, and robin was piping the first notes of his plaintive even-song, I sat alone in my cosy morning-room.

My mother (I call her thus because, in my creed, John's belongings were mine, too) had been ailing for a day or two. The strain of anxious, loving thought for her son had told upon that fragile frame, wearing it as the sharp sword wears the scabbard.

For our troubles were black around us as ever.

"If I had dealt unfairly by a single man in my employ, I would own to the wrong and make reparation," my darling said. "Some hands have just cause to complain of the masters; mine have none. I will not budge one inch."

It seems to me that I am telling my story in a strange, desultory fashion, but I cannot help it. I give you the memories of those days as they rise one by one before me.