

between her and their own children; and for this I was the more grateful, because it placed them, now and then, in an awkward position. They would have to listen, for example, while some casual visitor descended in warm terms on the singular beauty of their youngest daughter; and I overheard one preposterous flatterer tell my father how much she was like him: about as like, I longed to tell him, as I to Hercules. My father took it very quietly, smiling, and saying only, "She is not mine,—an adopted child." But I think my mother didn't quite like it.

I came very near betraying myself one evening; but fortune stood my friend. We had a young folks party, and a number of both sexes had gathered together. A proposal was made that we should "draw for sweethearts,"—for the evening, of course; but some one added jestingly, "Perhaps for life,—who knows?" So we wrote the name of each young lady (Jessie included) on a slip of paper, then folded these and shook them up in a hat which I handed round. It so happened that the number of young ladies exceeded by four or five that of the young gentlemen; so that, when all had drawn and my turn came last, there were still several slips remaining. I glanced at that which I drew and saw Jessie's name. In a moment, what Anne had said of my tell-tale face flashed across me; I turned instantly to hide my confusion by depositing the hat; and, as I did so, I dropped into it the name that was hidden away in my heart, and stealthily abstracted another unperceived. This time it was the plainest girl in the room; to whom, grateful for danger past, I cordially offered myself as partner.

But before the evening was over, I contrived to get possession of the slip with Jessie's name. This I secreted within the lining of a small bead purse which one of my sisters had worked for me. That purse and its enclosure exist still. I kept it hidden away in the secret drawer of a writing-desk.

Our experiment proceeded, smoothly and successfully, for more than two years,—two of the brightest years of my life; even though I had no means of judging whether Jessie's heart, in after-years, would turn to me or not.

I have heard the question debated, which is the greater happiness,—to love or to be loved. Theoretically, on purely ethical principles, one is led to the conclusion that to love is the higher privilege! and practically the experience of a lifetime confirms to me that view of the case. To love is best. It wears better, it has a nobler influence on a cultivated heart, than the mere consciousness of being loved, however grateful that consciousness may be to self-love, however, too, it may minister to vanity. The tendency of loving, if one loves truly, is to eliminate selfishness; but it often fosters selfishness to be the object of love. It is better to love without requital, than to be loved unless one can render double in return. It is not of love received, but of love given, that Paul, faithfully translated, speaks, in memorable words: Love, greater than faith, greater than hope, suffereth long, envieth not, seeketh not her own, endureth all things, never faileth. But the recipient even of the purest love may be dead to long-suffering, may nourish envy, may cherish self-seeking, may lack patience under adversity, and may fail when the hour of trial comes. Not he on whom love is bestowed is the favored one, but he by whom love is conferred. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

I never swerved in my loyalty to Jessie; yet, though I could not help being uniformly kind to her and watchful for her welfare, I tried hard never to give the child any reason to believe that I loved her otherwise than as I did my three sisters. They, on their part, treated her at all times with sisterly affection, as one of themselves; and this was greatly to their credit; for Jessie not only quite outshone them in beauty, but in musical talent, in grace in the ball-room and elsewhere, and ultimately in ease of manner. If, at the end of two years, a stranger had been asked to say which of the four girls had been raised from a humble home to her present position, I think Jessie was the last he would have been likely to select.

If I had remained at Braxfield, this novel experiment of mine could have had, I incline to believe, but one issue. It was otherwise ordered, however. In the winter of 1824-25, my father purchased a village and a large tract of land in Indiana, with what result I shall state by and by; and in the autumn of 1825, when Jessie was little more than thirteen years old, I emigrated to this country. I was sorely tempted, before I left home, to tell the girl how much I loved her, and that I hoped some day, if she should ever come to love and accept me as a husband, to make her my wife. But, while I was romantic enough in those days and later to do many foolish things, common-sense suggested that to a child such a declaration was ill-judged and out of place. So I departed and made no sign. With Anne, however, I conferred in secret; and she promised me, if I could not return in three or four years, to come to the United States herself and bring Jessie with her.

Though it is anticipating dates, I may as well here state the ultimate issue of this episode in my life. Two years later, namely, in the summer of 1827, longing to see Jessie once more, I joined an English friend and recrossed the Atlantic. I found the young girl beautiful and interesting even beyond my remembrance or expectation; and what moved me still more, she received me so cordially and with such evident emotion, that—though I think I may say that I have never been guilty of the presumption of imagining myself loved when I was not—it did seem to me the chances were fair that, if I re-

mained some months and spoke out, she would not say me nay.

But I determined first to make a confidante of my mother, in whose good sense and deep affection for me I placed implicit trust.

"My son," she said, "I saw, before you went to America, that you loved this girl and had already thought of her as a wife. But there is much to be taken into account in such a matter."

"You would prefer to have a daughter-in-law from our own rank in life?"

"If I could have chosen, yes; but I do not think that a sufficient objection. My own good father worked his way up from a position as humble; and Jessie's appearance and manners are as lady-like as if she had been my own child."

"But you have objections, dear mother. Do not withhold them from me, I entreat you."

"At least I should like to see what will be the result, on her character, of the next three years. I know you, Robert; you have a very high ideal of what a wife ought to be; unreasonably high, I am afraid. You think this girl perfect, but she is not. I should like to be sure that she will grow up free from undue love of admiration, and what is more important, perfectly sincere."

"Not truthful, mother?"

"I do not say that; though, when she first came to us, I sometimes thought it. She is very anxious to please, and occasionally says things rather because she thinks they will be agreeable than because they square with her convictions. I should like a more earnest and downright character in your wife."

"You wish me to give her up?"

"No; she has many excellent qualities; she has so affectionate a heart, and such winning ways, that there is not one of us who can help loving her. But I have something to ask of you, for your sake, dear Robert, not for mine. This girl is only fifteen, a child still; and you have to return with your father very soon to America. Do not commit yourself: you ought not to marry any one younger than eighteen or nineteen. Let three years pass. I'll take as much pains with Jessie, meanwhile, as if she were already my daughter; and I will report to you faithfully the result. Come back when the three years are passed; and, if I am then alive and you still wish to marry her, I will not say a word, except to wish you both all the happiness this world can afford." The tears rose to her eyes as she added, in a lower tone, "I only ask for delay; it may be the last request I shall ever make of you."

I have never made up my mind, since, whether I did right or wrong. But my mother was in very feeble health at the time, and I felt no assurance that I should ever see her again, as, indeed, I never did. If she had objected to Jessie because of her lowly birth, if she had spoken harshly of her, if she had told me she would never consent to receive her as a daughter-in-law, I should have sought to engage the girl, young as she was, then and there. But all she said was so reasonable, and the unfitness of marriage before three years so apparent, that I hesitated as she went on. Her tears, at the last, decided the matter. I gave her the promise she wished.

My word thus pledged, I felt that I must hasten my departure for London, whence we were to embark. The day before I set out, I asked Jessie if she would not like to visit her parents in the village; and when she assented, I proposed that we should take a circuitous route through the Braxfield woods, the last time, as it proved, that I ever saw them.

On no occasion in my life have I suffered from a struggle between duty and inclination as I did during that walk. As we passed, deep in the woods, a rural seat whence, through the foliage, glittered, in the autumn sun, the rippling waters of the Clyde, I proposed to Jessie that we should sit awhile, to rest and talk. What we said and how long we remained there I cannot tell. All I remember is, feeling at last that, if we sat there half an hour longer, I should break the solemn promise I had made to my mother. So we rose, went on, half in silence, to the village, where we separated,—and dream and temptation were over!

Ere the three years of probation had passed, Anne had died,* and Jessie had married a most amiable and estimable young man, in easy circumstances,—had married before I knew, even, that she had been sought in marriage. More than thirty years passed after that walk through the wooded braes of Braxfield before I saw Jessie again.

It was in Scotland we met, both married persons. I found her in her own handsome house, in a beautiful situation, surrounded by every comfort and some luxuries. So far as I could learn, she had so borne herself through life as to secure esteem and love from a cultivated circle of acquaintances.

Just at first I could scarcely recognize, in the

* In a letter from my father to myself, written soon after Anne's death, he says of her: "I never knew a judgment more severely correct than hers upon all subjects connected with the mind and dispositions. Whatever was needed to assist her in the education of her pupils she studied with unabating interest; and even you would be surprised to hear of the number of works which she read to store her mind with useful facts on all subjects for the benefit of those under her charge. She had patience, perseverance, and an accurate knowledge of human nature, and took an interest in the progress and happiness of her pupils, such as I have never seen excelled."

comely matron, the Jessie of my youth, until she smiled. But we met twice or thrice, and talked over the olden time, very quietly at first. During my last visit I asked her if she had ever known that I loved her and that I had wished to make her my wife. She said it had several times occurred to her as possible, even before I left Braxfield the first time, for America; that she had felt sure of it during the woodland walk, and especially while we sat together in that secluded spot, with the birds only for witnesses; but when I had departed to another hemisphere with no promise of return, and without declaring myself, she had felt sure it was because of her humble parentage, and so had given up all idea that she could ever be my wife. Then, with a frankness which even as a child she had always shown toward me, she added that she never could tell when she first loved me; and that if, during that last walk, I had asked her to become my betrothed, she would have said yes with her whole heart and soul. The tears stood in her eyes as she made this avowal; and she followed it up by saying, "I wished to meet you once, and to tell you this. But I know you will feel it to be best that we should not see each other, nor write to each other, any more."

I told her she was wise and good, and that I would strictly conform to her wishes; thinking it best so, for both our sakes. So even an occasional exchange of letters which, throughout our thirty years' severance, had been kept up at long intervals, has ceased from that day. And now, when more than another decade has passed, I am uncertain whether Jessie is still in this land of the living, or has gone before to another, where many dear friends who have been lifelong apart will find no cause for further separation.

Here let me confess that it needed, as prompting motive to overcome the natural reluctance one feels to confide to the public such details of inner life as one has seldom given even to intimate friends, a sense of the duty which an autobiographer owes to his readers. They are entitled, in the way of incident, to whatever of interest or value is strictly his own to relate; the secrets of others, however, not being included in that category.

When my father returned from Ireland, to find Jessie a member of his family, he related to us an anecdote which pleased me much, in the state of mind I then was, and which may be acceptable to others.

In the winter of 1818-19 a party of bright and lively young people had assembled, to spend the period of Christmas festivity at a spacious old country-seat not very far from Dublin. Several of them, ladies as well as gentlemen, had already acted creditably on the amateur stage; so they fitted out a large hall as theatre, and got up several standard comedies in a manner that elicited hearty applause. Encouraged by this success, they thought they might manage one of Shakespeare's tragedies; and their choice fell on *Romeo and Juliet*. They succeeded in casting all the characters except one, that of Juliet herself. It was offered to several young ladies in succession; but they all persistently refused, fearing to attempt so arduous a part. In this dilemma some one suggested an expedient. Miss O'Neill, then in the zenith of her fame, was an actress of unblemished reputation, most ladylike demeanor, and eminent talent, whom I once saw as Juliet. She was then regarded, justly I imagine, as the most perfect interpreter of Shakespeare's embodiment of fervid passion and devotion in the daughter of Capulet that had ever appeared on the London boards; her singular beauty admirably seconding her rare powers, and turning the heads of half the fashionable young men of the day. She was universally respected, was often admitted to the best society, and had several times assisted at private theatricals.

It so happened that she was then in Dublin, and, for the time, without an engagement. The proposal was, to write to her and ask her, on her own terms, to come to them and take the part of Juliet. This was eagerly acceded to, and a letter despatched accordingly.

The part of *Romeo* had been assigned to a gentleman of fortune and family. Mr. Becher of Ballygiblin, County Cork; *jeune encore*, as the French say, for he was still on the right side of forty, and excelling all his companions in histrionic talent. To him, as soon as the invitation had been given, came one of his intimate friends. "Becher," said he, "take my advice before it is too late. Throw up the part of *Romeo*. I daresay some one else can be found to take it."

"Back out of the part? And why pray? Do you think my acting is not worthy to support Miss O'Neill's?"

"You act only too well, my good fellow, and identify yourself only too perfectly with the characters you undertake. I know Miss O'Neill well; there can't be a better girl, but she's dangerous. She's perfectly bewitching in her rôle. It is notorious that no man ever played *Romeo* to her Juliet without falling in love with her. Now I'd be sorry to see you go to the stage for a wife."

"Marry an actress! and at my age! Do you take me for a fool?"

"Anything but that, Becher. I do take you for a whole-souled, splendid fellow, with a little touch of romance about him, impressive by beauty, and still more alive to grace and talent and I really can't make up my mind to address even that glorious creature as Mrs. 'Becher.'"

"Do talk sense, Tom. If I hadn't agreed to play *Romeo*, I'd go and offer to take the part now, just to convince you how ridiculous you are."

"Well, all I hope is that the enchantress will decline."

But she accepted. Becher played *Romeo*, shared the fate of his predecessors; was engaged within the month, and married a few weeks afterwards.

My father spent several days with them at their country-seat. He was charmed with Mrs. Becher, in whom, he said, he could not detect the slightest trace of the actress. And the marriage, my father told us, seemed to have been eminently fortunate, though up to that time they had no children.

In the sequel they had several children. Mr. Becher, eight years later, was created a baronet, lived thirty years with his wife, and was succeeded, in 1850, by their son, Sir Henry Wrixon Becher, the present baronet. Lady Becher died only last winter, loved and mourned by friends and dependants; having survived her husband more than twenty years.

With one other love-story, also brought by my father from Ireland, I shall conclude this chapter.

The names I have forgotten, but the circumstances happened in a country-house, the hereditary seat of an ancient and wealthy Irish family.

There, to its owner then only a few years married, was born a son and heir. There was, in his household at the time, a young woman of eighteen, fairly educated, but in humble circumstances, who had been retained as dependant rather than servant, filling the posts of nursery-governess, and assistant house-keeper. Let us call her Miss Norah Fitzpatrick. She was faithful, industrious, and good-looking, but with no pretension to beauty.

The infant heir of some thirty or forty thousand a year, committed to her care and daily carried about in her arms, became much attached to his nurse. His affection seemed to increase with years; and at the age of eight or ten, he used to call her his wife, and say he intended to marry her by and by. He returned from college some months before he was eighteen, and, true to his first fancy, after a time he proposed to Miss Fitzpatrick, then just twice his age. She told him that both for his sake and hers, such a marriage was not to be thought of; the great disparity of age, she said, was alone reason sufficient; but, aside from that, the marriage with one so far beneath him in social position would go nigh to break his parents' hearts and make himself unhappy; for which she could never forgive herself, and which would render her miserable, even as his wife. And in this she persisted.

Thereupon the youth ceased to urge his suit; but after moping about for some weeks in a listless way, took to his bed with a low fever. When the family physician, an enlightened man, found the usual remedies unavailing and the mother in despair, he said to her, "Madam, it is my duty to tell you that your son's condition seems to me the result of deep-seated mental depression. Something preys on his mind; try to find out what it is; you may then be able to do more for him than all the medicines in the pharmacopœia."

The next day the mother did her best to call forth her son's confidence, but for a time in vain. All she could get from him was, "It's no use, mother dear. It will only vex you."

But when she implored him, weeping, to tell her, he said at last: "I have loved Norah all my life. I asked her, since I came home, to marry me; but she refused me, because she said it would make us all unhappy. And say what I will, she sticks to it."

"My son, my son, how could you think of such a thing?"

"I told you it was no use, mother; I knew you would take it just so; but I haven't spirit to live without her."

Then the father was consulted; he was furious; but the patient's fever increased from day to day, and the mother's heart began to relent. "If it should kill him!" she said to her husband; "you know how you felt when I refused you the first time."

That touched him, but he held out three days longer, the young man appearing to sink all the time. Then, one morning, he got up with a sudden resolution and sought his son's bedside. "Listen to me, my dear boy," he said; "your happiness is my first object, but it is my duty to prevent you from doing anything rashly, which you may repent all your life afterwards. You are scarcely eighteen; that is too young to marry. I want you to make the tour of Europe before you settle down. I will find you an excellent tutor as companion. But I ask from you that you will not return to Ireland till you are twenty-one, nor correspond, meanwhile, with Miss Fitzpatrick. I must say she has acted very honorably; and if, when you return, you still remain of the same mind and she will accept you, your mother and I will not withhold our consent. But you must promise, on your honor as a gentleman."

And so the bargain was struck, the parents doubtless believing that three years would cure a boyish fancy. Two weeks saw the son well again, and prepared for his journey. On the very day he was twenty-one, he returned to claim his parents' promise; overpersuaded Norah; and my father, invited to their country-seat ten years afterwards, found them, he told us, one of the happiest looking couples he had ever seen. The lady did seem more like the young man's mother than his wife; but a thousand nameless, unobtrusive attentions testified that a marriage which the world doubtless pronounced preposterous was a true conjugal union, after all.